

# OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

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The Oquaga Press

DEPOSIT, N. Y.

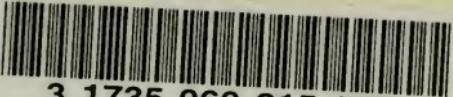
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*"Oil wells in the woods."*

# O I L W E L L S IN THE WOODS

BY

JOHN CHRISTOPHER O'DAY, M.D.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY

MISS ETHEL FARMER

AND PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTED BY THE AUTHOR



DEPOSIT, N. Y.  
THE OQUAGA PRESS

1905

Copyright, 1905,  
BY JOHN CHRISTOPHER O'DAY, M.D.

THE OQUAGA PRESS  
DEPOSIT, N. Y.

To

MY KIND FRIEND AND PRECEPTOR

DR. F. W. WINGER

WHOSE BIGNESS OF HEART

AND LOOSENESS OF PURSE-STRING

MADE MY PROFESSIONAL CAREER A POSSIBILITY,

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

\*\*\*

THE following story is based upon Oil Country events, with which many of my readers may find themselves familiar.

It has been the aim of the writer to appeal to those who live within the confines of oil-dom, but at the same time he has endeavored to portray characters and plot in such a manner that the tale may interest all lovers of fiction.

Where consistent, he has retained the names of those genial fellows who rightfully belong to any scheme with which crude-oil is associated, or further anything pertaining to the history of the Oil Industry.

Weatherbee, the villain of the plot, while purely a fictional character, is not an over-drawn picture of the "smooth gentleman" who, from Pit Hole to Bradford, was always on hand with a "good thing."

Facts have been adhered to, decorated of course with fictional ornaments, in the hope

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

of securing for this book a place among that class of works known as "Historical Novels."

The terrible death which befell so many drillers during the early days of the oil business, before the secrets of mother earth had been learned, is described realistically in the burning of the "Nelly."

The opening of Triumph Hill, the rise and fall of early oil towns, the Bradford boom, the McKean County fire, the "646" gusher, and the panic which followed its development, the intimidating and shut-down movements, the discovery of oil in Ohio, and the awful fire and flood of 1892, are events of which any one would make a book of no little interest.

THE AUTHOR.

OIL CITY, PA.

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I THE HUB OF OILDOM . . . . .	1
II CHRISTMAS MORNING . . . . .	4
III A VISION OF CHILDHOOD . . . . .	14
IV NINA . . . . .	26
V PLAYMATES . . . . .	36
VI THE DRILLING OF THE WELL . . . . .	41
VII THE MYSTERIOUS CAVE . . . . .	54
VIII MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH . . . . .	59
IX MY FATHER'S FUNERAL . . . . .	73
X MY MOTHER . . . . .	77
XI A MEETING OF INDIGNATION . . . . .	88
XII PIT HOLE, "THE CITY OF MAGIC" . . . . .	101
XIII "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY" . . . . .	109
XIV A YOUNG PUMPER . . . . .	117
XV THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE . . . . .	127
XVI ONLY A DRILLER . . . . .	137
XVII A FORGED CHECK . . . . .	147
XVIII BE MY WIFE . . . . .	157
XIX AN AWFUL FIRE . . . . .	163
XX THE MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES . . . . .	176
XXI WIND OIL . . . . .	189
XXII OIL IS BOOMING . . . . .	197
XXIII A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE . . . . .	209

## CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXIV THE FAMOUS "646" . . . . .	228
XXV THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION . . . . .	244
XXVI A SAD VOYAGE . . . . .	256
XXVII "WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE" . . . . .	267
XXVIII A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE . . . . .	279
XXIX "I LEAVE YOU FOREVER" . . . . .	288
XXX "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME" . . . . .	301
XXXI THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP . . . . .	312
XXXII THE IRISH POET . . . . .	320
XXXIII THE HORROR OF HORRORS . . . . .	329
XXXIV AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE . . . . .	342
XXXV "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL" . . . . .	352

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
<i>"Oil Wells in the Woods"</i>	.
	.
	.
	.
	.
	.
<i>"The Hub of Oildom"</i>	1
<i>"Nina"</i>	26
<i>"The Mysterious Cave"</i>	54
<i>"Looking in the direction from whence it came, we saw a monstrous flame shoot above the trees, into the very heavens"</i>	71
<i>Shanty life in the oil region. Preparing dinner on the steam-box</i>	85
<i>Triumph Hill</i>	101
<i>Amos Steffee delivering to Charles Lamberton the last oil certificate of the Exchange</i>	202
<i>The Famous "646"</i>	228
<i>"Poor old No. 1, with her wabbly beam, decaying sills, etc."</i>	268
<i>"Pass the Exchange to-day, with the exception of a farm wagon or two, you see nothing of a stir"</i>	313
<i>Refinery at Marcus Hook, Pa.—One of the many independents</i>	317
<i>A Group of Independents</i>	319
<i>"The Horror of Horrors"</i>	329
<i>"Where majestic buildings had stood a few hours before, nothing remained but a tangled waste of ruins"</i>	344







*"The Hub of Oildom."*

# OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

## CHAPTER I

### THE HUB OF OILDOM

IN one of the most picturesque spots along the devious path of the Allegheny River, where years ago the Seneca Indians, with their intuitive love for nature, had built their village, stands to-day one of the most beautiful cities of northwestern Pennsylvania.

The river, winding southward like a gigantic serpent, makes a sudden pause above the city's line, as if awed by the beauties of the place; then, turning westward in its channel, divides the city into a north and south side, before turning its course southward again.

In the heart of this famous metropolis, the river, for its westward courtesy, is compensated by the waters of Oil Creek, along whose borders is recorded the birth of the Oil Industry.

Why it is that this lovely and historic spot, with all its wild traditions, has escaped the novelist, is difficult to understand.

Some two miles above the city, Cornplanter Run, gushing down the mountain side, empties into Oil

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Creek. Here were the hunting grounds of the Senecas, one of the most powerful tribes of the Six Nations.

Cornplanter, their chief, who gave his name to the stream, was noted for his hatred of warfare, ruling his people by kindness; and tribes living hundreds of miles distant came annually to his lodge, where he preached words of counsel, sending them away with love instead of hatred in their hearts toward their fellow savages.

At these gatherings the ceremonies were concluded by lighting an "oil fire" around which the warriors danced, taking their departure as soon as the oil had been consumed.

This oil, flowing from the petroleum springs along the creek's border, was directed into side pools, where it accumulated from year to year and was used as an offering of "good will" to the tribes who had honored Chief Cornplanter with their presence.

Evidences that the present site of Oil City was once occupied by a race antedating the Indians and their traditions are not wanting. Among them are the existence of old pits of which the Indians knew nothing, their structure betraying mechanical skill not possessed by the red man.

These were found at regular intervals along the Oil Creek valley, for a distance of fifteen miles above the mouth of the stream. They were sunk to a depth of twenty or thirty feet beneath the surface, and cubbed up with split logs, preserved to the pres-

## THE HUB OF OILDOM

ent day by the action of the oil with which they have become thoroughly saturated.

In August, 1859, Colonel Drake drilled the first oil well seventeen miles above the mouth of Oil Creek, an event which gave to the world a new light.

The greasy fluid that for centuries had been oozing from the fissures of the rocks, and had been used by the aborigines as a medicament, or to illumine the war dance, was eagerly sought by countless hundreds who were attracted from all parts of the world to participate in the new discovery.

In a brief time the Oil Creek valley, from its mouth to the present site of Titusville, was a cluster of oil derricks, while at its mouth a town sprang up, and was dubbed Oil City, the name which to-day conveys the picture of a very pretty city.

Solomon declared: "There is no new thing under the sun."

The petroleum industry is new, but petroleum is mentioned by writers of antiquity, as far back as the Old Testament.

## CHAPTER II

### CHRISTMAS MORNING

NINA SMEDLEY stood upon the veranda of her home, calling "Good night!" to the friends who were rapidly disappearing down First Street in a large sleigh.

"Good night, folks," she said, turning to go inside; "Merry Christmas to you!"

"Good night, 'Nine,'" came back in chorus, "same to you, and many of 'em."

Nina hurried into the house and threw her wraps and furs carelessly upon the hall chair. The blood which had been circulating vigorously through her cheeks, making them look like red apples while exposed to the cutting December wind, now began to recede, and feeling the sudden disturbance of circulatory equilibrium, she moulded her palms around her face to allay the tingling pain.

Suddenly her little nose inclined upward, dilating as it did two pretty pink nostrils through which little sniffs of air were taken for olfactory analysis.

"Papa is up yet," she said, smiling through her hands. "I smell his cigar; goody! I must find him and tell of our sleighride."

Dropping her hands from her cheeks, and leaving the little nose to come down of its own accord, she

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

bounded across the hall to the library door which stood ajar, and through which the fumes of a good Havana were escaping.

Peeping in, she saw her father sitting before the fireplace, his slippers feet resting on a rug in the warming blaze of a natural-gas fire. His head reclined on the back of the chair, while his eyes seemed fixed on the bric-a-brac which adorned the mantel; and with an automatic-like gesture the arm and hand holding the cigar levered to and from his mouth.

For a moment Nina stood in the doorway. "That's deep meditation," she soliloquized, stepping in beside him. "Waiting to see Santa Claus?" she laughed, putting her arms around his neck, and giving him a kiss which was immediately followed by a strangulating cough from the half-frightened father.

"Ha! ha! ah! ah! why, girl, you made me swallow a mouthful of smoke! Ha! eh! why are you prowling around so late? Isn't it enough for one of us to be up to welcome in Christmas?"

"Yes, papa dear, but Christmas has been here for an hour;" and she pointed to the clock on the mantel. "Here you sit toasting your shins and filling the house with smoke, and I know from your absorbed look that something besides Christmas is on your mind."

"Good cigar, though," Mr. Smedley ventured, holding the half-burned tobacco cylinder at arm's length and viewing it admiringly. "Little too strong, however, to have its smoke crammed down

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

your throat by such big kisses. Where have you been?"

Drawing a footstool beside her father's chair and seating herself upon it, she looked up into his face. "Wish girls could smoke," she said, resting her arm on his. "It seems to me you get so much solid comfort from your cigars."

"That's not answering my question," Mr. Smedley corrected, stroking his daughter's hair. "Where have you been?"

"Oh yes, I nearly forgot. The Weatherbees gave a Christmas Eve sleighing party; we had just the grandest time. There were twelve couples of us."

"Who was your escort?" her father asked, puffing his cigar while he awaited his daughter's answer.

"Mr. Payne," she answered hesitatingly.

"So!" he said, looking reproachfully at her. "You know, Nina, this is displeasing to me. When and where did you meet this gentleman, and who is he?"

For a moment Nina drooped her head in silence. "I am sorry to have displeased you. I met him at the Charity Ball. Mr. Loomis introduced us. I do not know who he is or where he comes from, but he seemed so nice I asked George Weatherbee to invite him to join the sleighing party."

"Nina!" He was about to reprimand her severely, but anticipating his thoughts she put her hand to his mouth.

"Don't say another word, papa dear, don't scold me now; it would make my Christmas a gloomy one.

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

To-morrow you may." Big tears were now in her eyes. Mr. Smedley tossed his cigar stump upon the hearth, and putting his arm affectionately around his daughter drew her close to his side.

"All right, little girl; as you say, nothing to mar the merriment of the day." Nina brushed away with the back of her hand the tears which were welling up, and kissing him fondly whispered, "Wait here a minute. I have something for you." Leaving the library, she hurried up-stairs to her room.

"Am I a crank?" Mr. Smedley asked himself. "It kills me to be cross with her, but this seems like a silly flirtation on her part, that I never will tolerate. This fellow Payne seems too much like an ordinary man to suit my taste—but pshaw! why worry? Nina is no fool, she has never expressed a word of silly sentiment, and never was there a fellow hinted love to her that she didn't tell me and laugh at the funny things he said—bless her heart, I believe I am jealous of her."

Here his thoughts were interrupted by Nina's glad voice singing as she came tripping down the stairs:

"Ring the bells merrily  
Ring the bells merrily,  
Christmas is coming,  
Christmas is coming;  
Gather the little folks  
All 'round the fireplace,  
And together we'll sing  
'Round the Christmas tree."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The last word died away as she re-entered the library. "Merry Christmas, papa dear," she said tenderly, holding a beautiful smoking-jacket and a pair of embroidered slippers before him. "There is your Christmas gift, from a naughty little daughter."

Giving her an approving look, Mr. Smedley rose from his chair and removed his coat. "They are beauties," he said; "let me try on the jacket."

"How lovely it fits you; now sit down while I bring a fresh cigar," she said.

Resuming his seat, her father removed his old slippers and replaced them with the new ones Nina had dropped upon the floor while helping him to don his new jacket. "Your taste is excellent, Nina dear; both the presents are beautiful. Thank you, and don't feel hurt over my little cranky spell, I meant nothing but what was for the good of my little girl," he said.

She laughed, handed him the fresh cigar, and striking a match upon the tile of the hearth, held the flame so he could light it. "Of course I'll forget about it, you darling old papa," she agreed. "Merry Christmas to you, and may you have hundreds of them, too."

"Hundreds, eh?" he repeated laughingly; "you want me to be a Methuselah instead of an ordinary oil producer, do you?"

"Well, call it dozens, and I'll be satisfied."

Rising to his feet, Mr. Smedley took a match from his vest pocket, unconsciously re-lighted his cigar,

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

and stood with his hands and back toward the fire for several moments, apparently lost in deep meditation.

"Nina," he said, his voice conveying unmistakable emotion, "do you remember when first you heard the little song you were singing as you came down the stairs?"

Nina's head drooped. She read sorrow in her father's face, and the remembrance of her mother filled her own heart with sadness. Her lips and chin quivered perceptibly, tears glistened upon her lashes. "Yes," she answered, "mother sang it to us the last Christmas she was on earth."

Nodding his head affirmatively, he laid his half-smoked cigar upon a little tray on the mantel, and facing his daughter who stood in grief—a grief called into being by the remembrance of her mother—Mr. Smedley caught her face between his palms, imprinted a kiss upon her forehead, and with voice trembling with emotion, said in broken whispers, "You are so like her, Nina!"

"You see, little girl," he continued, "it is but natural that I miss her. Of course you remember her as she was to you—a little girl's mamma; but, Nina, if, as a woman, you could know what a lovely character your mother was, then you would be able to remember and miss her as I do—faithful little soul! every minute of her life to the very end."

Turning to the mantel he picked up the still-lighted cigar, blew a whiff of smoke toward the ceiling, then

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

resumed his seat, while she, rearranging the footstool by the side of his chair, sat down with her face toward the fire. Occasionally the hurrying footstep of some late pedestrian, passing over the crisp snow-covered pavement, or the snapping of the frost, broke the silence.

"Weren't the doctors able to save her, papa?" Nina asked, looking up into her father's face; "why did she die? I never thought of it so seriously before. Tell me about her, won't you please, papa?"

After a few moments of oppressive silence, he began:

"Perhaps I can best tell you what an angel she was by a brief outline of our lives together.

"When oil was discovered by Colonel Drake in 1859, people were attracted from various parts of the country to the Oil Creek valley where he drilled the first well. It was not long till stories of the accumulation of great wealth were rumored as a result of this speculation, and with the crowd I moved to the scene, leaving the farm, to seek a fortune.

"Petroleum Center, at that time, was the metropolis of the oil trade, so naturally to it I first drifted. I found employment under a Mr. Martin,\* who was building a system of pipes to convey oil from the wells to the cars and boats. Your mother was teaching

\* M. C. Martin built the first pipe-line system, and his scheme was imitated by many others. Finally a consolidation of the various systems was effected, and is known to this day as the United Pipe Lines. This was the nucleus from which sprang the Standard Oil Company.

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

school at that place, and from the first minute that I saw her to the hour of her death I loved her.

"When Mr. Martin sold his pipe line I went with him to the new developments in the Clarion County field, where I was employed as pumper for him until embarking in the producing business for myself. When we were married, I took your mother into a little rough-board, oil-country home.

"One night as I sat reading by a kerosene lamp it suddenly occurred to me that I was distressingly poor, and that my wife was entitled to a better home than the one in which I had placed her. My thoughts, indifferent to my will, reverted to the days I had wooed and won her.

"Something filled me with remorse. I looked at the empty walls plastered with old newspapers, the miserably cheap furniture, the smoky stove over which it was her privilege to cook me three meals a day, the boiler-house bench, upon which stood a new wooden pail and tin dipper. My eyes then fell to the floor, rough and uncarpeted, and amid all this—the result of marrying without money—and as a ray of sunshine to brighten the homely scene, sat the little wife, her face radiant with the glow of contentment, busily sewing a pair of my overalls she had washed the day before.

"Mentally contrasting the airy show of consequence with which I had deported myself when courting her, with the substantial way my surroundings were then betraying my poverty, my guilty consci-

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

ence was smitten with remorse. Throwing the paper upon the table, I pulled my chair across the room to her side.

" 'Girlie,' I said—that was what I always called her—'do you regret having married me?' I shall never forget her look of complete amazement as she answered, 'Heaven forbid! why do you ask such a question? have I in any way betrayed such a thought?'

" 'No, my darling,' I said, 'but on the contrary you have never, as well you might, complained of this shanty home, and my better self is deriding me for the way I have imposed my poverty upon you. Forgive me for allowing my love to overrule my judgment, but believe me, I shall make every effort to rise from my present condition.'

"The expression of surprise which pervaded her sweet face while I spoke disappeared as suddenly as it had come. Letting the overalls drop to the floor, she put her arms around my neck and said in sudden passionate appeal: 'Never again entertain such foolish thoughts. I have married you to share your home, your name, and your future. Your home is humble, but it suits me; your name is free from dishonor—more to me than riches; your future is my future; and with love and honor ours, we can make it what we may. If God, who is above, be pleased to give us health, all else will come in accord with His divine will.'

"When at last we retired for the night I felt that her words had taken form and stood guard, as an

## CHRISTMAS MORNING

angel might, over us. The inspiration of that night never left me. It was in that same little home that she brought you into the world, and it was there we lived and planned till I had saved enough money to drill my first well.

"But, Nina, it is late, and I would talk till daylight if you were here to listen, for I would never tire talking of her—but you, child, are not to feel my sorrow. You had better retire for I see you are sleepy."

Nina rose slowly from the low stool, and after a pause patted him sympathetically upon the head, then kissing him tenderly, left the room without uttering a word.

## CHAPTER III

### A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

M R. SMEDLEY was a very proud man—not purse proud, but with the pride born of successful ventures in life. A vein of sentiment approaching the poetic coursed through his nature, cropping to the surface here and there in a love for flowers, the sweetness of children and, as he himself often expressed it, “the fragrance of pure womanhood.”

Music, whether from a great organ or a street player, stirred strange emotions. Every ragged child, destitute woman and drunken wretch was a pathetic study. He loved the poor and in many ways aided them, yet his own wealth he guarded carefully, knowing how strong a barrier it was between his family and the crimes of poverty.

When Nina had gone, he sat with hand-shaded eyes looking intently into the fire. Grotesque forms arose here and there as the flames glowed to and fro. Silently he watched, cherishing an inward hope that her face might appear.

He heard the early morning express coming in the distance along the Allegheny valley, and immediately his mental vision saw a long train stretched out in a valley bordered by high hills on one side, and a river on the other.

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

He leaned back in his chair with an audible sigh. "No," he thought, "no man without means can marry Nina, with my consent. She must be taken to a home as good as the one she leaves; true, I was poor when I married her mother, but how many young men are capable of doing what I have done?—not one in a thousand, not one. I will be gentle with her, but firm. Dear girl, she is safe now, why borrow trouble?"

Stretching his legs at full length and clasping his hands above his head, he gradually fell to sleep. Toward daybreak, when the purple twilight was proclaiming the coming day, a sudden change of temperature, characteristic of the climate of north-western Pennsylvania, occurred. The thermometer rose several degrees, and with the daylight came a fall of soft, feathery snow.

It was quite light when he awoke. Stretching his arms and yawning, he stepped to the window and looked out into the spacious lawn. Every branch and twig of the trees bordering the walk in front were heavily laden with foam-like snow.

"If a 'green Christmas' makes a fat church-yard,'" he was thinking, "this one will not be so merry for the undertakers. Ah, give me a 'white Christmas!'"

Going to his room he made his morning toilet and returned to the library. Nina, who had slept but little, rose when she heard him about and came down in time to join him at the breakfast table.

"Did you retire?" she asked, when they were

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

seated. He smiled to evade answering directly; she understood and chided him for being so neglectful of his health. "Papa, you must quit sleeping on chairs; if you don't, I shall hide every cushion," she protested.

"Well, how much better did you sleep? I am sure you went to bed." He smiled again, but this time his smile was a mysterious one.

"Why of course I went to bed; but tell me what you mean, why are you so sure of it?"

"Did I never tell you," he said in reply, "the story of the woman who had a cork leg?"

Nina looked at him confusedly. "Why, how mystifying you are this morning; tell me first how you knew so positively that I went to bed last night."

"Hear the story first," her father replied, laughing outright; "perhaps from it you will understand."

"Two friends had been separated for years," he began, "and during the time they both married. One of them, upon learning the whereabouts of the other, resolved to pay his old friend a visit, and accordingly he and his wife started out. They were gladly received, of course, and given the best room in the house, which happened to be directly over the room of their host."

"The next day, while the two men were enjoying their after dinner cigars, the host said, 'Old fellow, there is one thing about your marriage that is a puzzle to me.'

"What is that?" the other asked; "surely you

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

know nothing about it beyond what you have seen since our arrival here yesterday.'

"'Well,' the host replied, 'how did you come to marry a woman with but one leg?' The fellow stared blankly for a moment at his friend, and asked, 'Who told you?' 'Then I am right?' 'Perfectly.' 'Well, when you retired last night, I heard but one shoe thrown upon the floor.' "

Here Nina burst into laughter. "Oh, papa, what a 'Sherlock Holmes' you are! you heard me discard my shoes, eh, and reasoned from that?"

"How did you sleep?" he asked, sprinkling salt into his egg cup.

"Well enough, I guess," she replied, "but I dreamed all the time—I dreamed of mamma."

Mr. Smedley looked up suddenly. "Did you? I used to, but I haven't dreamed of her for a long time; tell me what you dreamed."

"It seemed more like a vision than a dream," she began, "for I am sure I was not asleep; it seemed so real, too, that even now my mind regards it as an actual happening.

"It seemed I was a child, and we were living in the same little house in the woods above the Clarion River. I saw myself playing on the old porch in front. Mamma stood in the doorway, looking the same as she did when we lived among the wells. Then I thought I saw the little Payne boy with whom I used to play. Then it seemed as if everything was on fire, and we were running to get away

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

from it, when I suddenly found myself out of bed and on the floor."

"Did your mother speak to you?"

"Only once; when the fire started she said, 'Run with Johnny, Nina, he will protect you.'"

Breakfast over, taking his daughter by the arm, he led her to the large parlor, and pointing to several well-rounded packages said, "Guess Santa Claus dropped these some time during the night."

Seating himself in an easy chair, Mr. Smedley watched the eager hands of his daughter break the seal of each parcel, and as she revealed each of the beautiful gifts, he would say, "For a little girl who would do anything for her papa."

After inspecting the last of the gifts, her eyes sparkling with girlish appreciation, Nina ran to his side, and between showers of kisses answered in assuring tones, "Yes, my dearest of fathers, *anything.*"

"Then, Sweetheart, there is just one thing."

"Mention it, papa."

"It is hardly worth while, little girl; I am sure you possess good sense; but your kindly feeling for Mr. Payne has put strange ideas into my head."

"Father, what do you mean? Mr. Payne is a stranger to me; besides, he is nothing to me. I met him as I told you, at the Charity Ball, and because he was a stranger here, I asked George Weatherbee to invite him to the sleighing party."

"All right, Nina, but remember, it would kill me if you should throw yourself away on a man who

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

could not give you a home as good as the one you have here. All I ask is, never marry beneath your station in life; now that's all—not another word—I must go to the office to arrange for the sale of what oil I have been holding in the line." \*

When Mr. Smedley had gone to his office, Nina sat down upon the floor and viewed the presents as she had left them scattered in wild confusion around the room. "Poor father, he is all wrapped up in me; how very strange of him to regard Mr. Payne in such an anxious mood," she thought.

Her hands fell loosely into her lap, while she fixed her eyes vacantly upon one of the figures of the carpet. Suddenly she gave a start, and casting a look toward the door to assure herself that no one had seen her so absorbed, rose to her feet, gathered up the gifts and put them upon the table in the library.

"Could it be possible?" she said to herself. "Oh, that I may see him again! I well remember what a

\*When a producer of oil delivers his product to the Standard Oil Company, he can, if he desires, leave it with them for any period of time before asking for its money value. This is frequently done in hope of the oil market going up.

For thirty days after receiving the oil, the Standard will hold it free of storage; after that so much per barrel is charged. The Standard entered into an agreement with the producers to give them thirty days' free storage on their oil, but that all such oil held will be subjected to a general average to make good any loss sustained by fire or flood, etc.

The speculative spirit is so prevalent among oil men, that it is said every time the Standard has a loss there is enough oil in free storage to make it up at little cost to each individual producer. This is understood as "holding oil in the line."—  
AUTHOR.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

gallant little boy he was—and if it is he, I am sure father would not object to him.” Then she thought of her dream, and leaning her elbow against the mantel, took to linking the little boy of her vision with the Mr. Payne she had met at the ball.

A ring of the hall bell aroused her, and she rose to welcome her friend, Grace Weatherbee, who had called to discuss Christmas presents received and given.

“Oh Grace, is it you? How lovely you are looking this morning! Come here till I show you my presents from papa.”

Nina and Grace were very intimate friends, and each being an only daughter, found in the other a companionship which was fostered by that longing possessed by every lonely girl for a sister.

“Aren’t they dear?” said Grace, as Nina led the way to the table.

“Yes, indeed, papa is really extravagant with me. Did you get home all right last night?”

“Yes, but I was nearly frozen. I made all the folks come in and drink a cup of hot coffee before going home. John drove the horses into the barn till they were ready to start out again.”

“Well, how generous of you. Poor me had to go to bed without coffee.”

“I am sorry, Nine, but the idea didn’t occur to me till after we left you, and poor Mr. Payne was as glum as an old crocodile after you had gone.”

“Now Grace, quit your teasing. Even papa had

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

something to say about him; goodness! can't a fellow look at me any more without having you and papa fuss so about it?"

"Oh certainly, child," said Grace, throwing her arm around her friend's waist, "don't take things so seriously; but honest, all the girls have been raving about him, and call you lucky."

"Me? why, how funny!"

"Yes, but we could see how very much interested you seemed to be in each other. Now, honest, Nine, don't you think he is just lovely?—honest now, don't you?"

Nina felt the hot blood rise to her face; she knew her feelings were hard to hide—why deny it to her dearest and truest friend? "Yes, Grace, I will be frank with you," she said, "I do think Mr. Payne is very nice, but, of course, he is a stranger; perhaps if I knew him better I would change my mind. Where is he from?"

"Not very far away," Grace answered, patting Nina's blushing cheeks; "papa says he is from Bradford, and is a delegate from the Producers' Protective Association convention, and is here as a committee man to interview some of the Standard officials regarding the low price of oil—did you notice his hands?"

"Yes," Nina replied, "noticed they were big ones, is that what you mean?"

"No, didn't you notice how rough they looked? Papa says he is only a driller, and we are not going to

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

allow any driller to captivate the sweetest and prettiest girl in Oil City; poor George is as jealous as he can be, too."

"George—jealous! why Grace, how you talk! George has never paid much attention to me;—jealous! Why mercy, is he of the Miles Standish type, who gets jealous when he thinks some one might speak for themselves?"

"George is reticent, I know, but I am sure, Nina, that he is very fond of you."

"I do not doubt it, Grace, not in the least, and George and I have always been good friends; but as for Mr. Payne's hands, I consider it an honor for a man to have his hands roughened by honest toil, no matter what. And as for his being a driller, look at Senator Emery—did he not rise from a driller to the highest position the state could give him? I'll venture that his hands, to this day, bear evidence of his early toil."

Nina's eyes were growing moist. Grace saw she had made a mistake, and turned the conversation into more pleasing channels. "There now, you are getting serious again; don't mind what I have said, tell me how you like this present." Taking a little package from her muff, she handed it to her friend.

"Darling, just darling!" Nina exclaimed, undoing a tiny silk case with a variety of dainty lace handkerchiefs folded within. "I dreamed of fire last night, and they say, 'Dream of fire and you will be

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

made glad.' There must be something in dreams, according to this, for, Grace, your gift just makes me feel so glad."

"I am not superstitious," Grace broke in, "but there is something about dreams that to me is curious."

"What is that?" Nina asked.

"I have often wondered why it was that a dream, a mere fancy, or the result of a bad stomach, was capable of exciting the higher centers of the brain, compelling them to re-act just as they do in recalling things that are real. See how your memory records every detail—and you seemingly dead—and in the morning when you wake you are conscious of what you dreamed, your memory has the whole tale recorded. I think it wonderful.

"I must go now," she added, kissing her friend, "I have a few missions to execute. The next time I come, we will discuss in detail the philosophy of dreaming. Good-by, and merry Christmas."

After her departure Nina lapsed again into thoughtful mood. She loved Grace, but something in her demeanor that morning made her irritable. "Why did she make fun of his hands?—'Only a driller!'—goodness! look at my papa, he used to drill and pump wells, he was even poor when he married my mamma. It seems when we acquire wealth in this topsy turvy old world, we have to become some sort of a new race and worship gold instead of God.

"Papa has it, too; his whole worry concerning me

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

is a constant fear of my marrying a poor man—as if poor men were criminals."

Another ring of the hall bell interrupted her thoughts. Going to the door, a boy in messenger's uniform stood before her.

"Does this be where Miss Nina Smedley lives?" he asked, holding a letter in his hand and reading the name.

"Yes, I am Miss Smedley, step in."

The boy obeyed, and stood with cap in hand as she broke the seal and read the contents. "Is there to be an answer?" he asked, when he saw her refolding the paper.

"No answer, my boy, but here is a Christmas present for bringing me so nice a message." She placed a new, silver dollar in his outstretched palm.

"Thanky Miss, the fellow what got me to bring it gave me one too. Now I am going to buy my ma a present."

"Dear little fellow," mused Nina, as she watched him vanish up the street; "going to buy his ma a present! bless him for his ma's sake."

Going to her room she closed the door and read the note again and again. It was brief, and free from any unnecessary wording.

### MISS SMEDLEY:

"You will, I trust, pardon this presumption. I was in hopes of seeing you before leaving the city, but business compels me to depart immediately. I leave, hoping to see you again. With your permission, I will call next month. Kindly write me

## A VISION OF CHILDHOOD

whether it will be agreeable. A letter to me, care of St. James' Hotel, Bradford, will reach me in safety.

"Respectfully,

"J. C. PAYNE."

Clasping her hands around her knee, she let the letter drop to the floor where her eyes followed it. "My heart says, 'Yes, let him come,' but I will leave it all to father; he knows best, and whatever is to be will be and must."

## CHAPTER IV

NINA

SITTING on the doorstep of our little, low, unpainted oil country home, which nestled among the trees upon the hill overlooking the Clarion River, I was surprised to see my father coming home at such an unusual hour. The dinner pail and lantern, inevitable to all oil well workers, dangled at his side, and under his arm he carried a bundle of overalls.

As was my childish custom, I left the step and ran forward to meet him. "Hello, pap!" I exclaimed, "is the well broke down again?" Occasionally the valves in the well would play out, and at such times my father would be at liberty to return home till the "roust-a-bouts" had them repaired.

Impatiently he thrust me from him. "Oh, keep out of my way, boy," he said. My mother, hearing my first outcry of "Here's pap!" came to the door in time to see him turn so abruptly upon me.

"Don't push the little fellow away like that, Tom," she said pleadingly; "can't you see his joy in running to meet you?"

"I didn't mean to be rough," he said, handing me the dinner pail. "Here, Johnny, you will find the pie all there yet"—his voice changing to tones of affection as he addressed me.



*Nina.*



## NINA

Taking the proffered pail, I resumed my seat on the steps. Holding the can between my knees, I pulled the cover off by catching under the edge of the lid with my finger nails.

"Well Eliza," began my father, seating himself upon a stump in the yard, "I have lost my job." The woman whose husband is dependent on wages can, I imagine, hear no news so perplexing as that of her husband "losing his job." For a time she remained silent.

Our dog, who was wont to follow my father to and from the well, and who had learned to regard the opening of the dinner pail with interest, jumped upon the step beside me to share the repast; but with her foot my mother gently restrained him. "We shall have enough to do now feeding ourselves," she said, addressing Carlo. "Get down, sir."

"Don't take it so hard as all that," my father remarked, leaving his seat on the stump for one beside me on the step. "Never mind, Eliza," he continued, "there is lots of work at Greene City. Butler County, they say, is the place of good jobs now."

"But you had such a good pumping job, how did you come to lose it?"

It was some minutes before my father answered. "In a way," he said, "I suppose I am to blame, but that man Robinson is a slave driver, and I can't have a man talk to me as if I was a dog—I don't have to."

"Tom, you are so sensitive; why do you take

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

things so to heart? Mr. Robinson has so much to look after that he is not always in an agreeable mood. You should consider all these things."

"Oh, I'm not the only one he has had trouble with,—no one likes him, he is a crank. Last week he issued an order commanding all pumpers to carry no less than one hundred and twenty pounds of steam on their boilers. Think of it, one hundred and twenty pounds of steam to pump one well. To-day when he came to the well, the first thing was to find fault with the amount of lard oil used on the engine; then noticing that I had but one hundred and fifteen pounds of steam instead of the amount he gave orders to carry, he began talking to me as if I were a nigger, and when I refused to listen, he told me to go."

Knowing my father's impulsive nature, my mother was always reluctant in agreeing with him when in trouble of this kind. "Was it necessary," she asked, "to ignore his order?"

"No," he answered, "but absolutely impossible to carry out. No man could maintain a fixed pressure with the miserable slack coal he furnishes us for fuel; anyway, what sense is there in this uniform pressure business? What the Company wants is the oil, and I've been getting that."

"It is all Greek to me, Tom, just so you haven't acted impulsively."

"Impulsively or not, I cannot have a man regard me as his inferior; position is all right, but the true gentleman will never hurt feelings."

## NINA

My mother maintained her position in the door while father spoke. "Well," she said, stepping out and seating herself between us, "I don't like the work anyway; so many men," she continued, running her fingers through my hair, "have been killed lately by the boilers exploding. Why can't you seek other employment?"

"No wonder the boilers are blowing up; the idea of compelling men to carry one hundred and twenty pounds of steam; if the Emma\* ever blows up and kills some one, Robinson and his high steam pressure will be to blame." He was very emphatic in mentioning Robinson's name.

"Every boiler that blows up nowadays, killing some poor devil, is charged up to low water; but I know it is the unnecessary high steam pressure those newly made and inexperienced superintendents are compelling the boys to carry that is responsible."

At this juncture Carlo, who had disappeared around the house, began a series of short barks announcing that some one was coming. Stepping to the corner of the building, my father nearly collided with Jim Boyd, commonly called "Big Jim."

"Hello, Jim, never mind the dog, he won't bite."

"I knew it, Tommy," replied the newcomer, saluting my mother at the same time; "I could tell that

\*In the early days of the oil industry the wells were designated by names, usually feminine, in honor of some one in the family of the owner. The "Emma," named for Emma Stell, now of Newark, N. J., is still, notwithstanding being one of the first, a faithful producer.—AUTHOR.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

from his extravagant barking." Picking me up, he held me at arm's length above his head. "You'd better give me this boy, Mrs. Payne," he added, putting me back on the step.

"I fear you would get tired of him," my mother said; "he is quite naughty at times."

"If he's any worse than I was at his age, he's a bad one; but he'll come out all right,—'boys are boys,' you know.

"Well Tom," he said, turning to my father, "I hear you and old Robinson had a scrap—he's like your dog, lots o' bark, but no bite."

"We were just talking about it, Mr. Boyd," said mother, "and I have been accusing Mr. Payne of being too impulsive; tell us what you heard; stories are as different in proportion, you know, as the number of times they are told."

"Didn't hear anything particular, Mrs. Payne, but nobody likes Robinson—he's all puffed up on his self because he's superintendent, and if it hadn't been for his wife's father being the head of the company, he'd never got the job."

"I want my husband to quit working around boilers, but he says he's going to the Butler County field. I wish you could secure him a position with you, Mr. Boyd. I do not like the idea of being left alone in the woods here."

"If you would like to go drilling, Tommy," he said, "I'll try and get you on the next well with me. There's talk going 'round now that the drillers are

## NINA

going to get more pay than the tool dressers; and that anybody can dress a bit—more crazy notions, for a fellow's got to know how to temper steel or he's not in it in this sand rock country. And what is there to learn about drilling?" he continued in the same breath; "all you have to do is run your tools to bottom, tramp up the slack rope, hitch on the temper screw, start your walking beam, and turn the rope to keep the hole round, that's all; Johnny here could do that—couldn't you, Johnny?"

This little allusion pleased my boyish vanity, and from that minute I looked upon Jim Boyd as a wonder. "Not so with dressing," he went on; "got to be a first class blacksmith to understand tempering steel right."

Jim, while not classic or scientific in reasoning, was always positive in his conclusions, and while his crudeness of thought was ever perceptible, it seemed to vanish under an authoritative air—Jim always knew.

"Don't lose any sleep over it, Tommy, old man," he said, rising to go; "Robinson is hated by all his men—he don't know a polish-rod from a monkey wrench, so it won't be agin you in getting 'nother job. I'll see Weatherbee to-night, and try to get you on next well with me."

Within sight of our house, and toward the river, the top of a new derrick peeped above the trees. With his hand Jim indicated this to be the next well. "I'm going down now," he said, "to see how near

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

the rig-builders have finished; don't go to Butler till you hear from me. Good-by, Tommy and Mrs. Payne," and he started off in the direction of the new well.

"Good-by, Mr. Boyd," I cried, feeling he had overlooked me, at the same time remembering how he said I could drill. "Good-by, little man," he called back, and disappeared over the hill.

"Good soul—that fellow," my father remarked, as Jim's head vanished among the underbrush bordering the path to the river.

"Indeed he is," my mother agreed. "Oh, I hope he can induce Mr. Weatherbee to take you on with him! how near home it will be."

My father, like many other men who had come to the oil fields to work on the wells, was of the opinion that good times, good wages, and good jobs would last forever; and with this belief assumed the air of independence prevalent among the men, and responsible for much of the friction between the managers and themselves.

"Nothing like a man being independent," my father said, going into the house. "I'll get another job, and mark my word, I'll be the driller on that well with Boyd." The prospect of my father going to be a driller, and on a well so near home, filled me with joy.

"Never get discouraged," I heard my mother say as they entered the house together. "We must work together for a start in life, my boy must be educated."

## N I N A

"He will be," I heard father say.

This reference to my future welfare, together with the anticipation of my father becoming a driller, elated my spirits to the degree of hilarity. Calling Carlo, I made a run into the woods, clapping my hands and yelling, "Sic em! sic em!" As we had chased many an old woodchuck, ground squirrel and rabbit, my dog naturally supposed I had seen something, and sniffed the ground, jumping here and there, as if to find a scent which would explain my excitement.

Recalling where one old ground-hog had his home under a stump in a field above the woods, I changed my course, and wended my way through the brush to a stake and rider fence, which bordered a near field. How well I remember the scene! The rounded top of the hill was clear of woods—a monument to the ax of an early German settler. It was late in August, but the heat was intense.

Climbing the fence, and seating myself on the top rail, I watched the butterflies fluttering over the field, alighting here and there upon the golden-rod or thistleblow which had taken possession of the ground since the discovery of oil had made farming unnecessary. Big winged grasshoppers rose vertically to a height of fifteen or twenty feet above the weeds, and thrilled out their peculiar whirring song, the notes of which mingled with the squeak and groan of walking-beams moving lazily up and down in the hot rays of the sun.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Jumping from my perch, I carefully picked my steps through briars and tangled grass toward the stump where I knew the woodchuck had his abode. Carlo preceded me, and when I reached the place I found him circling around, thrusting his nose into the long grass here and there in hopes of finding the trail. Sniffing into the mouth of the burrow for the third time, he started in the direction of the woods, barking in a way I fully understood.

The woodchuck was out feeding; I knew he would take for his hole the minute he discovered the dog, so I doffed my jacket, rolled a stone up in it, and thrust the wad into the opening. This done, I armed myself with another stone, and took a position behind the stump.

In a few minutes I heard the dog cry—not the cry of victory, but the wail of pain. Unmindful now of my bare feet, I hurried to the rescue. At the corner of the fence, his head hidden beneath a stone pile, he stood, his legs wide apart and projecting forward, his tail switching uneasily upon the ground.

Immediately I grasped the situation; poor Carlo was being held by the woodchuck who, venturing too far from his fort, had taken refuge under the stones. One by one I displaced them from over the scene of action. The moment I cast the first stone aside, Carlo recognized my plan and wagged his tail vigorously in approval.

Soon I had thrown enough of them aside to take a view between the chinks. Dog and chuck had

## NINA

locked their jaws together. With a stick I attacked the enemy from the rear. Reluctantly he gave up his little intrenchment. Belaboring him sorely, he finally crawled out, maimed and bleeding, preferring death to the continuous blows of my stick.

Too weak for further encounter, he rolled upon his little fat side and faced the end with the fortitude of true courage. The execution over, Carlo sought the shades of the stone pile and panted furiously.

Standing triumphantly over the dead victim, I was about to pick it up by the foot, when a sweet childish voice from behind startled me. "Oh, Johnny, Johnny Payne! you are a bad, cruel boy." Turning, I stood face to face with Nina Smedley, the little girl I loved above all others.

## CHAPTER V

### PLAYMATES

HOW embarrassed and ashamed it makes us when, by chance or otherwise, a little of our evil nature has been discovered by one we have hitherto tried to impress with our goodness. I felt the hot blood rise to my face, my head drooped in a sense of guilt, my mind found no excuse to justify killing the harmless little creature who lived alone in the field.

Nina, who lived just over the crest of the hill, was my daily companion. Our homes were the only ones within neighboring distance. She had a natural love for all living creatures, and knowing this, I usually avoided her on my exploits of robbing birds' nests, and drowning squirrels from their holes.

But now, face to face with her, the dead wood-chuck and panting dog in evidence of my crime, my every fiber thrilled with remorse, and gladly would I have undone the deed if possible.

"You are bad," she repeated, "bad and cruel."

"Why?" I asked, without looking up.

"Why?" she repeated, stamping her tiny foot upon the ground; "for killing that poor hedge-hog. Mama says 'it is a cruel sin to kill God's little creatures.' "

"Tain't no hedge-hog," I corrected, "it's a ground-

## PLAYMATES

hog, and theys dangerous, pap says they steal cabbages."

This little controversy gave me courage, I looked up—she was in tears. What an angel she seemed! Even now I can see her as she stood before me with checkered dress and pink sun-bonnet hanging carelessly by its tie strings over the back of her head.

"I am sorry," I ventured timidly.

"Are you honest?" she asked, looking at me inquiringly. Her big eyes seemed to penetrate my very soul.

"Yes, truly, and if you won't cry any more, I promise—hope to die—to never kill 'nother thing."

"Cross your heart, too?" she said with childish sincerity.

"Yes, cross my heart, too," I added, outlining a cross with my finger tips over my stomach more than the region of my heart.

Taking the dead animal by the foot, we walked in silence to the stump, and dropping it upon the ground I withdrew my jacket from the hole and with the stick with which I had plodded him so relentlessly, I now as willingly dug his grave. Taking him by the four feet, we laid him upon his back and covered him over with loose earth, Carlo standing by as sole witness and mourner of that childish funeral.

Brushing the yellow clay stain from my jacket and putting it on, we started across the field in the direction of her home. Mechanically I took her hand

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

in mine, holding it as we walked along together through the deep weeds and grass.

"My papa is going to drill a well for himself," she said, as we sauntered around one of the derricks on the way; "he told mamma last night he had the money now."

"My pap is going to be a driller," I said, boastingly. "Jim Boyd said so."

"How does he know?"

"He told pap so a little while before I came up; he's going to ask Mr. Weatherbee to give him the job."

Here we came to a puddle of water back of an oil tank, which had been prevented from evaporating by a film of heavy oil upon the surface. Tightening my grasp upon her hand, we walked sideways on the plank which stretched across it, and reaching the opposite side, we stopped to dabble in it.

With the stick with which I had killed and dug the grave of the woodchuck, I parted the heavy oil, exposing the clear water beneath. Venturing closer, I plunged my big toe into the oil, but withdrew it suddenly, it was so hot from the sun. Then the pumper of the well happened out upon the floor of the derrick, and drove us away.

"Git out of there," he called, "you'lls get your clothes all dirty." Hearing her mother call, "Ni-na," we immediately turned our steps toward the house. "I'm coming, mamma," she called back, her little voice rising clear above the noise of the groaning well.

## PLAYMATES

"Where were you, child?" her mother asked as she entered the yard.

"Down there," she replied, indicating with her hand the direction of the stump. "Johnny and Carlo killed a poor hedge—I mean ground-hog, I saw them. Oh mamma, it was so sad!" and she began crying.

"I promised, 'hope to die, and cross my heart,' never to do it again," I said, looking earnestly at her mother, from whom I feared another reprimand.

"Don't cry, petty," she said, stooping down and taking her little daughter in her arms, "Johnny is sorry, and won't do it again."

As we were nearing the house, my sense of smell, so acute in boyhood, detected fresh fried cakes. Mrs. Smedley's generous nature had been previously shown upon many such occasions, and to have Nina begin crying at such a time was annoying in the extreme. Would she keep it up long enough to make her mother forget our stomachs, or would the latter strive to allay her grief with a nice fresh doughnut? Ah, that was the question my mind was trying to decide.

"Give her a fried cake, Mrs. Smedley," I said; "don't cry, Nina, I won't do it any more—your mamma's going to give you a fried cake."

Going into the house, her mother returned with a large figure-eight doughnut in each hand. "Here children, come sit on the steps and eat these."

"I'm not hungry," I said, in apology for my timely hint, "but I love fried cakes 'cause they taste like candy."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The golden sun, reflecting a play of colors upon the soft fleecy clouds of the west, was gradually sinking behind the hills before I started for home. Entering the woods, the dusk of evening fell rapidly about me. Crickets were chirping their dolorous song, and from the darkness of the hemlocks below came the solitary hoot of an owl.

A whip-poor-will skimming closely to the ground, flew athwart my path, and soon I heard his doleful song ring out upon the evening air, "Whip-poor-will, whip-poor-will." When I reached home it was nearly dark, and from the rays of an oil lamp on the table I saw my mother busily engaged washing the supper dishes.

My father and Jim Boyd were seated on the steps outside, smoking their pipes and talking jovially together.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

THE next day Mr. Weatherbee called upon my father. Riding horseback as was his custom in making his daily rounds among his men, he came into the yard, and addressed my father without dismounting.

Seeing his approach from where I was making a play-well, I ran to the house. "Mr. Weatherbee's coming on his horse," I half whispered, peering through the doorway.

"How do you do, Mr. Payne?" said Mr. Weatherbee, throwing the rein over the pommel of his saddle; "this is where you live, is it?"

"Yes, sir," my father replied, casting a look on the rough shanty home, "rather where we stay; anything is good enough here in the woods."

"Most assuredly, Mr. Payne," was the reply, "anything, so long as you are happy."

"Well, young man," he said, addressing me, and pointing with his riding-whip to my play-well, "are you drilling for oil, too?" I gave him a grin for an answer, being too elated for utterance. Smiling at me in a way meant to please a boy, he turned again to father.

"Mr. Boyd tells me you would like to go on the

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

well below here; do you think you would like drilling?"

"Yes, sir, but are you willing to take on an inexperienced man?"

"You can't learn younger, Mr. Payne," replied Mr. Weatherbee; "I shall be glad to put you on; you and Boyd ought to make a very good team."

"Thank you, Mr. Weatherbee, I appreciate your kindness and will do my best to prove worthy of your confidence," said my father. Young as I was, I could see that he was actually moved by Weatherbee's apparent kindness, contrasting it, no doubt, with the abrupt sullenness of Robinson, who the day before had discharged him.

"You found Mr. Robinson a hard man to work for, Mr. Boyd told me." He seemed to know just what my father was thinking about.

"Very."

"What was the 'Emma' doing when you were pumping her? Pretty good well, isn't she?"

"Yes, indeed," my father went on to tell, never suspecting that Weatherbee had for months been trying to find out the exact production of the well. "She puts out her two hundred barrels a day as regular as the clock."

As Weatherbee turned to ride away he noticed my mother come to the door. "Mrs. Payne, I presume," he said, raising his hat courteously, and galloping off up the path through the woods toward the field.

"There's a fine man," said father, addressing my

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

mother; "he knows how to treat a working man; too bad Robinson hasn't some of his principles, and I am glad now that Boyd did speak to him; it was good of him, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very kind," my mother replied, "but Tom, I don't like this man Weatherbee. I watched him as you were talking and formed a dislike. Oh, he—I don't know, but he seems insincere."

My father was amazed. "Dislike," he repeated, "insincere? Why, Eliza, are you whimsical?"

"Maybe," my mother said, reflecting.

"Why, of course; no maybe about it," he said enthusiastically. "Every one of his men think the world of him." Mother said no more, but returned to her work in the house.

That evening Mrs. Smedley and Nina came to stay till Mr. Smedley returned from town. Nina carried a lantern which had been trimmed and filled to light them on their way back. Their coming was a joy to me. Taking my little playmate by the hand, and leading her to my "play-well," I explained its intricate parts.

A forked stick driven into the ground and braced with wire taken from an old broom, made the Sampson post complete. A slim sapling balancing in the crotch served admirably for a walking-beam, to which I had attached a section of inch pipe flattened on the end like a drilling bit. Pushing it suddenly into the piece of tubing, to show her how it worked, the muddy water splashed out over her face and

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

clothes. For a moment she thought I had tricked her, but my pleadings soon dispelled the idea and she forgave me.

It was nearly ten o'clock when her father returned from town. He carried a basket of groceries, and gave to each of us a stick of red-striped peppermint candy which he found at the bottom. Jim Boyd was with him and acted unusually funny—I heard mam say that it was not the best thing for Mr. Boyd to go to town.

"Well, Tommy, old partner," he said, putting his hand on father's shoulder and patting it several times, "everything is ready for us to 'rig up' in the morning. We'll drill her down to China if we have to, won't we? Tommy you're all right, I'll bank on you—experience or no experience—getting her down. I told Weatherbee that you were all right—any spot or place—and he said he would put you on. Didn't I tell you I'd get you the job? Robinson's no good, he's only a big bluffer, like your dog, Tommy—like your dog—lots o' bark but no bite."

Mr. Smedley winked at my mother and, looking toward father, put his finger on his lips as a hint for silence. "Smedley's going after grease, too," Jim went on; "he can't get too big a well to suit me,—and say, where's the candy I got for the 'kids'?"

"I gave it to them, Jim; come now," Mr. Smedley said, catching him by the coat sleeve, "let's go home; you'll need sleep if you intend to start the 'Nelly' in the morning."

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

The next day was an eventful one to me, for I was to carry my father's dinner to the well. Impatiently I waited the noon hour to come. I could hear the clanking of pipes, hammering of steel, and slapping of ropes, mingled with the voices of my father and Boyd as they called to each other from the floor to the top of the derrick.

The woods were too thick to afford a view, yet I applied each sound to some particular imaginative procedure. At last my mother called, "Come Johnny, take your father's dinner to him. I have put in enough for you, too."

I whistled a signal to Carlo, who came running around the house wagging his tail, delighted at the sight of the dinner pail. Together we hurried down the stony path, bent upon reaching the well in the shortest possible time.

As I left the yard I could feel that my mother was watching me from the door, but I would not look back; instead, I straightened out my shoulders and tried to assume the air of Boyd, remembering how he appeared the day he walked away, calling "Good-by" to us.

When in sight of the rig, my father came to meet me and took the pail. Boyd sat on the ground in the shade of the engine house, munching his dinner. With a couple of new pine boards, left by the carpenters, we fixed a seat upon which we spread the dinner between us.

Father shared the hot coffee with Boyd, and when

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

dinner was over he spread his coat upon the ground in the shade of the trees above the rig, where I was told to sit out of their way. Here I sat, Carlo lying at my feet, apparently as much interested in the process of "rigging up" as I was myself.

It was after four o'clock before they had things ready to start spudding. Everything was now in readiness, steam was blowing from the safety valve of the boiler, the engine pump kept its valve clicking to supply the boiler with water, the heavy tools stood upright in the derrick and seemed to look down upon the great band-wheel with impatient longing for their trip down through the rocky ribs of old mother earth, to tear from her bosom some of her hidden treasures.

"All right, Tommy! throw on the rope and we'll drop 'em into the conductor." Doing as he was told, my father kicked on the heavy bull-rope, and up went the great auger-stem, till it swung like the sword of Damocles over the square wooden box, which was sunk to a depth of several feet to act as a guide in starting the drill.

Reversing the engine till the tools rested on the bottom, Boyd untied the rope from the arm of the wheel, and throwing three coils around the shaft, handed the free end to my father, and starting the engine again, stepped back to give him his first lesson in the drilling of oil wells.

That evening my mother went with me to the well. She carried the supper in a basket, and I took care

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

of the can of coffee. We stayed till long after dark. How proudly I took it upon myself to explain the engine and boiler to my dear little mother, and how delighted she seemed in my newly acquired stock of "oil well" vocabulary, as I talked of "sand-reels," "bull-wheels," "headache-posts," and many other curious things, not forgetting the "Jack-post" that was riding a pony-sill, and the "Sampson-post," big and strong enough to let a heavy beam walk on it from one end of the day to the other.

Derrick lamps hung in profusion to illuminate the scene. Around their smoky flame was a halo of gnats and millers, seemingly intent upon making one grand display in which to gather courage for the voluntary suicide they intended committing, by flying into the blaze, never to rise again.

My father's progress as a driller was phenomenal. Boyd took all the credit upon himself. "I learnt him," he was often heard to say. Mr. Weatherbee came to the well every day, and seemed pleased with the way things were progressing. That he took an unusual interest in the drilling of the "Nelly" was commented upon.

When he came the second day he brought two more men to work the opposite tour to Boyd and my father. Several accidents occurred, delaying the work, and four weeks elapsed before the "first sand" was reached.

One Sunday, about two weeks before the well was completed, father, mother and I took a walk to the

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

river, and naturally, we stopped at the well. How quiet and still everything seemed! The boiler was cold, the engine stood lifeless upon its oaken block, and the heavy tools hung upon the "wrench," above which projected the rope-socket, streaked with newly formed rust.

Father was explaining all to mother, poor woman, and I remember yet how she presumed to understand. We were just starting from the well to the river, when we saw a strange old lady coming toward us. "Who is she?" my mother whispered. "Don't know," my father answered, "never saw her before." We waited in the path for her to come up to us.

She looked sad and careworn. Upon her head a little black bonnet trimmed in jets rested over a mass of beautiful gray hair. She wore a plain black dress, adorned with a tasty ruffle at the bottom. Around her neck a delicate white ruche peeped above a collar made of several folds of black veiling, and fastened in front with a cameo brooch. Her bearing was cultured and refined.

"How do you do?" my mother said, addressing her pleasantly; "it is quite unusual to see a woman of your age climbing these hills."

The stranger rested a few moments to catch her breath before replying. "Do you know is this the well a Mr. Weatherbee is having drilled?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," my father answered promptly; "I am one of the drillers."

"Indeed," she said resting upon the stick she

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

carried; "how fortunate I am; then you can tell me what I want to know."

"Come, let us get out of the sun," my father suggested, leading the way back into the derrick and brushing off the driller's bench with his hand. "Sit down, you look tired," he said, placing the bench near the door for her.

Mother and I seated ourselves on the bellows, while father made himself a seat by placing a block on the top of the anvil. "What do you wish to know?" he asked, when the woman had rested a little.

"My name is Martin, sir," she began. "I live some six miles from here and do not leave home very often, but I felt I had to venture out this time, as the land on which this well is being drilled belongs to me; and as so much depends on whether it will be a good one or not I just couldn't wait, but concluded to start out and see for myself—tell me, sir, do you think you will find oil?"

My father looked amazed. "I didn't know who the land belonged to," he said. "I did hear some talk of Mr. Weatherbee having only a tax title, but I cannot say whether we will get oil or not."

"But why are you so slow about drilling it? It seems a long time since you began," she said.

"We have had a little bad luck, but if things continue as they have the last couple of days, it will not be long until we finish up," my father replied.

"You see, sir," the woman continued, "I was unable to pay the taxes, and when it appeared for

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

sale, Mr. Weatherbee bought it. Of course a tax title is not bona-fide, but if you find oil, my royalty, Mr. Weatherbee explains, will pay up the back taxes and leave me an income sufficient to keep me the balance of my days. Now sir, if you are the driller, what, in your judgment, are my prospects?"

"As I said, Mrs. Martin, it is impossible to say, though personally, I nurse the idea that we will get oil." Picking up a piece of pine, my father began to whittle, while mother and I sat in silence listening to their conversation.

"You surely didn't walk all the way from home," my father asked.

"No, sir, a neighbor's boy drove me to the foot of the hill, where I told him to wait—we came in a buggy."

"How long have you owned this land, Mrs. Martin?" my father asked.

"Since the war, sir; my husband bought it from an old German who was going to Ohio. Shortly after the purchase, my husband was drafted and went to the front, leaving me alone with a baby boy. The last time I heard from him they were making preparations to march to Gettysburg. I never heard from him again, but a month after that terrible battle, they wrote me that he had been killed. Oh, sir, that's what turned my hair."

This was too much for my mother's tender feelings; leaving her seat, she put her hand gently upon the woman's shoulders, and bade her not to weep.

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

"Don't give way to your feelings, Mrs. Martin," she said sympathetically, "it may all be for the best—your son will be a comfort to you—don't now, it will only make you ill."

Mrs. Martin tried to control herself, but it was difficult for her to do. "For a while," she continued, wiping her eyes at intervals, "I managed to get along very well. During the summer I sewed, and in the winter taught rural schools. I had but one purpose in life—the bringing up of my boy. Oh, and he was so good, too—we were like brother and sister, he was never impatient with me, and just as I was seeing the future man in him, he contracted a severe cold which rapidly developed pneumonia, and died.

"For a time I kept up, but my grief continued, prematurely aging me, and leaving me as you see, a physical wreck. Unable to pay the taxes, and regarding it perhaps as worthless, I allowed this land to go. When oil was discovered near St. Petersburg, a man came to me asking to lease it, to which I consented; but when he went to Clarion, he found it had been sold to Mr. Weatherbee, who had a tax title.

"Shortly after this Mr. Weatherbee himself called; he was very kind and assured me that he would arrange matters so in case oil was found I should have the royalty. He advanced me a sum of money, for which I gave him a warranty deed, and if the land proved to be good oil territory, I was to receive the royalty, but otherwise, the land would be his."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

I shall never forget the look which my mother gave my father, when Mrs. Martin had finished. "The unexpected often happens in this life, Mrs. Martin," she said. "I hope Mr. Weatherbee will be able to do all he has promised—but you should have had a written agreement, and had his intentions been honorable, he would without hesitation have put it in black and white."

"Eliza!" my father exclaimed, jumping to his feet, "you wrong Mr. Weatherbee; you should not slander any one."

My mother's face reddened: "I didn't mean to slander him, but why this slipshod way of transacting business with a lone woman?"

"You will find, Mrs. Martin," my father said, "that Mr. Weatherbee will do everything he has promised you; my wife don't like him, but *I* do. Was your husband in the Pennsylvania Infantry?" he asked suddenly, as if the thought had just occurred to him.

"That was his company," she replied, looking inquiringly at him. "Why, were you a soldier?"

"Yes, and of the very same company; your husband was my messmate I think—was his name Fred?"

"Yes, Frederic; did you know him? Ah sir, you need no word from me then as to his character—and you knew him!"

"Yes, I knew him and loved him as a brother," my father said, and shutting his knife and throwing down the stick, he caught her hand firmly in his.

## THE DRILLING OF THE WELL

Mrs. Martin turned to my mother and said, "Yes, as you say, ma'am, the unexpected often happens in this life. God only knows what the future has in store for us."

Excepting the breaking of the wrist-pin, the work on the well progressed nicely. The following week Mr. Weatherbee called, and when my father informed him of Mrs. Martin's visit, he looked surprised. "Poor old soul," he said smiling, "she is very nervous; my wife has taken quite an interest in her."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MYSTERIOUS CAVE

**B**Y this time I had grown weary of spending so much time around the well. The affection I possessed for my little playmate proved to be more enduring than the momentary excitement of the whirring wheels and clattering ropes; so when the novelty had worn away, my visits to her home were once more renewed.

One night as I lay sleeping, I dreamed my guardian angel's face was like Nina's, and that she stood with outstretched wings beside my bed, imploring me to kill no more of God's little creatures.

Like most boys, I took special delight in killing something. It seemed to be my nature; but the influence for good which she possessed over me was sufficient to curb my destructive inclinations; but in turn poor Carlo had to suffer. He would often look reproachfully at me as if to say, "What on earth is wrong with you lately?"

If I were to write on the formative influences of my life, that is, those influences which tended to mould my character permanently, I would begin it by the influence of a good and loving mother, followed by the influence of other good women I have known.

October, with its frosty nights and sunny days



*"The Mysterious Cave."*



## THE MYSTERIOUS CAVE

had now arrived, transforming the foliage into one huge bouquet of intermingled scarlet and yellow, each tuft unconsciously betraying the location of every maple tree.

Below Nina's house, on the bank of Ashbaugh Run, stood a great cave formed by a cluster of mammoth sandstone bowlders. The footpath leading along the stream toward the river went directly through it.

Many times had we explored its darkened chinks and corners, believing it had at one time been the home of the Indians. "Come," I said to Nina one day, "let's go down the hill and gather some pretty leaves. I saw some beautiful ones on a bush near the cave." So we sauntered down the slope, stopping now and then to pick the "crow-foot" and winter-green berries growing along the way.

Crossing the brook on a fallen tree, we walked toward the mysterious cave, with its apex pointing toward the sky, while its base remained firmly fixed and imbedded in old mother earth. Into its gloomy atmosphere hand in hand we walked, stopping here and there to decipher the names cut upon its granite-like walls.

"There's a story in the book what pap bought me," I said, gazing into the vault, "of a boy what took his penknife and cut notches in a cave like this, and climbed up nearly to the top. He wanted to put his name above where George Washington had cut hisn, and he was nearly being killed 'cause they had to get him down with ropes, and his poor mam

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

stood at the bottom, crying and crying, till they had got him down."

At this juncture we heard the voices of men approaching from above and my story was suddenly interrupted. Intuitively I said, "Let's hide, they may be Injuns coming." Getting back into a dark corner, we hid behind a spur of rock jutting in above the floor of the cave. No sooner were we secreted, than to our surprise and astonishment Mr. Weatherbee and Jim Boyd walked in.

"It's nice and cool in here, Jim, isn't it?" Mr. Weatherbee asked, wiping his face and neck with a snowy handkerchief.

"Yes, cool in summer and warm in winter," Jim replied, taking a bite from his plug of tobacco, and thrusting it back again into his pocket.

Seating themselves upon the rock behind which we were hiding, they began talking in just audible tones about the well my father and Boyd were working on. "Now Jim, you understand," Mr. Weatherbee said, putting his hand on Jim's shoulder in a way meant to inspire confidence, "I would explain this to Payne, but he has not had the experience you have had, and could not understand, you know." Jim nodded the assent of the flattered. "Some day," Mr. Weatherbee continued, "I will need an assistant and have you in view for the position; so what we have to say must be said in confidence, Jim, and kept strictly secret between ourselves." Boyd nodded again.

## THE MYSTERIOUS CAVE

"Now remember, until I can dispose of those Pittsburg fellows who are trying to buy all the land they can around the 'Nelly,' she is not to be completed; so when you have reached a depth of—say—seven hundred feet, tell Payne you have reached the sand and that there is no oil, report the same to me, and I will order you to shut down and pull out—see?"

Then they rose from their seat and walked out into God's sunlight, poor Boyd all puffed up with false flattery, and Weatherbee, in his egotistic pride, gloating over his power in persuading others to act in such a way that his own selfish and dishonest plans might be accomplished.

It was late when I reached home that evening. My mother was alone, and gave me a mild reprimand for being so late to supper. "Well, Johnny," she asked, "what was yours and Nina's amusement to-day? Was it dolls or oil wells?"

Her allusion to dolls hurt my boyish pride. "Neither," I said. "We were picking leaves and winter-green berries, and—say, mam," I went on hurriedly, "we hid in the 'Injun' cave when Mr. Weatherbee and Jim Boyd came in. We didn't know who it was at first, so we hid—and say, mam, Mr. Weatherbee said that some Pittsburg fellows were going to buy all the land around the 'Nelly,' where papa's working at, and he told Jim not to tell pap, and not to let him finish the well. He said when they had drilled down about seven hundred feet, to tell pap she was deep enough, and that they

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

would call her a dry hole. I was sorry for hiding  
'cause they talked so long."

The expression which pervaded my mother's face  
when I had finished my story I shall never forget.  
"My God! My God!" she exclaimed, "I knew it,  
I knew it!"

## CHAPTER VIII

### MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

MY mother knew now that if Weatherbee's scheme was carried out, Mrs. Martin would be doomed to financial ruin, and for a long time after I had eaten my supper she sat deep in thought, meditatively drumming her fingers the while upon the table.

Occasionally, her face wore the expression of hatred and contempt, and knowing that something was displeasing her I reasoned that she was angry with me.

"I'll never do it again, mam," I said, going to her and putting my hands upon her cheeks, whereupon she looked sweetly at me, and taking my hands in hers kissed them, first one, then the other, and said, "No, it isn't anything you have done, my dear boy, but I want you to run down to the well and tell your father I want him to come up for a minute."

Glad that no act of mine had produced the displeasure I had read in her face, I eagerly sought my cap and stood before her, waiting for final instructions.

Ever thoughtful of my welfare, she took my little red-topped boots from the closet back of the stove, and bade me put them on.

"These cool nights," she said by way of explana-

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

tion, "the bad, old copper-heads are liable to be lying on the dry, warm paths, and if you didn't have your 'booties' on you might get bit, and then I wouldn't have any little boy."

Her suggestion of snakes made me timid, and every shadow and crooked stick that was outlined in my path made me jump.

When I reached the derrick, Boyd was sitting on an empty nail keg, scraping a new sledge handle with a piece of broken glass, and with a stick between the reins of the temper-screw my father was walking back and forth around the hole, coiling and uncoiling the slack cable above the flared-out top of the casing.

"Well, son," my father said, surprised at seeing me, "isn't it about time for you to be in bed?"

"Mam wants you to come up right away," I replied.

He looked frightened. "Is she ill?" he asked.

"No, but she's mad 'bout something."

"Mad!" he repeated, with emphasis. "If she is, Johnny, it is the first time since I have known her."

"She isn't very mad," I said, feeling that I had done my mother an injustice, "but she wants you to come up right away."

"Go," said Boyd, fitting the new handle to the heavy sledge, "I can run things till you get back; the screw won't be out for half an hour yet."

Returning to the house, we found my mother sitting by the table, and that she had been weeping was evident.

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

"What on earth is wrong, Eliza?" my father asked, noticing her red and swollen eyes.

Beginning with the Sunday they had conversed with Mrs. Martin at the well, my mother took up a line of reasoning against Weatherbee, denouncing him as dishonest, and a clever villain.

"You know, Tom," she said rising to her feet, "that from the very first I did not like him, and told you so, but you only laughed at my suspicions, which at that time was right for you to do, as I had no reasons then for speaking as I did; but when Mrs. Martin told us that she had transferred to him the original deed in consideration of a small sum, plus the promise of a small royalty, which the drilling of the 'Nelly' would determine, I felt *then* that he had shamefully wronged her; for why should he make verbal promises that could as easily have been incorporated in the deed? But now I am able to see through his treacherous scheme."

"You speak in riddles," my father said, looking inquiringly at her. "Come now, Eliza, tell me what has gotten you into such a state of excitement."

"Let your son tell you," she replied, placing a hand upon my head. "Johnny, tell your pap what you and Nina heard Mr. Weatherbee say to Jim Boyd to-day in the cave."

When I had related my story, my father, looking straight into my eyes, said in stern and emphatic tones, "Young man, is this the truth you are telling?"

Not knowing the importance or interpretation my

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

parents were placing on my story, I became alarmed and embarrassed.

"Tell me," he continued, laying his hand heavily upon my shoulder, "is this the truth?"

Mistaking his natural impulsiveness for exasperation provoked by some unintentional offense on my part, I broke into sobs.

"I'll never do it again, pap," I returned convulsively.

"Never do *what* again?" he said sharply.

"Hide in the cave; we didn't know who was coming."

"Oh, Tom!" my mother said, with true understanding of my feelings, "don't frighten him so, tell him what you mean."

"Did you hear Mr. Weatherbee," he said, "tell that to Mr. Boyd, did you?—answer me truthfully—yes or no."

"Yes, pap," I answered.

Releasing his hand from my shoulder, I ran to my mother, and buried my face in her lap.

Seating himself in a chair, my father sat for some moments looking at the floor, and swinging his cap aimlessly between his knees. For several moments he sat thus, meditating.

"Well, Eliza," he said, rising to his feet, "this is no affair of ours. I am working by the day for Mr. Weatherbee, and whenever he sees fit to stop me, he can—every man employing men surely has that right."

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

"Yes, I'll admit that," mother said, "but they have *not* the right to defraud helpless widows."

"But this is none of our business," my father insisted.

"Oh, Tom! why do you provoke me in this way? If you give voice to a lie by saying the well is no good, you, too, participate in the fraud against Mrs. Martin. You know it as well as I do—and think, Tom, you a soldier, too—her husband's comrade, who saw him give up his life that the nation might live. It was a fight for homes on both sides, and now you are trying to excuse Weatherbee for defrauding the widow of a soldier by pleading 'it is none of our affair.'

"Suppose *you* had been the one killed, and that *I* was being tricked as you know Weatherbee is trying to trick her, do you think that Martin, your old comrade, who stood shoulder to shoulder to you in one of the bloodiest battles that history has ever recorded, would be a partner in wrong against the wife of his dead comrade? If you think he would, go on; but remember, Tom, there will be a day of reckoning, and God pity those who suffer the remorse of a guilty conscience."

This sudden burst of eloquence from my mother seemed to bring my father to his senses.

"I guess you are right, Eliza, I had not thought of it in this way before—tell me what I can do."

"Do?" my mother said, "do? why, stand by your convictions like a man, and insist that the well is not deep enough, let come what will, but be true to your-

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

self as a man. When they try to make you believe you have drilled deep enough, tell them point blank that you haven't, and that you cannot pronounce it a dry hole till it is drilled to the proper depth. Ah Tom, there is no trait in a man so manly as courage."

"If courage is not a part of my nature," he said, making ready to go, "thank heaven for a wife who knows how to impart it to me."

When he turned to leave for the well again, my mother went and kissed him. When he returned to the rig, he found Mr. Smedley, who had happened to drop in, talking to Boyd.

"Good evening, Thomas," Mr. Smedley said, as my father came into the derrick, "I just came in to see how near you are to the bottom, and if you have any showing yet. My well will be nearly on a southwest line from here; guess the boys are ready to start spudding in the morning."

"If you don't do better than we have here," Boyd said, with his usual authentic air, "you won't get oil 'nuff to grease your boots with."

"You are too pessimistic, Jim," Mr. Smedley returned, with a smile, "wait till you get the sand."

"The *sand*," Jim repeated, tossing his head knowingly, "what sand? Do you mean the sand of some Chinaman's rice garden? Why, we are through 'em all—first, second, and third, and she's dry as punk!"

My father was now in a position to fully appreciate the import of my story; he said nothing, however, until he and Jim were left to themselves.

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

That night I was unable to sleep. I tossed restlessly in my bed trying to induce slumber, but my father's threatening finger, and the shake he had given me on the shoulder when he asked for the truth, had unnerved me. Once I stole from my bed to the water-pail outside the door on a box, in hopes that a drink from the tin dipper would quiet me.

As I opened the door, a flood of cool air seemed to cover my face. What a beautiful night it was! Clear and frosty, while above the trees, and spreading far away over the river and hills, was a great canopy of stars. How still it seemed! Excepting the puff, puff, puff, puff, of the engine as it swung the heavy tools up and down in the well, and the occasional slapping of the drilling line against the girts of the derrick, not a sound could be heard.

The white clouds of steam rose high above the trees, reflecting back the flickering light of the derrick lamps below, and suddenly the clang of the heavy sledges upon a bit of rimmer rang out upon the frosty air, filling the woods with that music recognized the oil country through as the "hammer song" of good times.

Hurrying back to bed, I cuddled under the clothes to get warm, as standing in the door so long had chilled me. The sudden changing of my surface temperature acted as a sedative to my over-wrought nervous system, and just as I was falling into the "land of nod," I heard the crown-pulley groan out its hideous creak, telling me that the screw was out, and

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

the tools on their way to the top, to have their dull bit exchanged for the one I had just heard them sharpen.

When Mr. Smedley had gone, my father took Boyd into his confidence. "Jim," he said, pausing between his words, "did it ever occur to you that Weatherbee is a pretty slick kind of a fellow?"

"Slicker en grease," Jim replied.

"Do you think," my father continued, "he is as fond of us as he pretends?"

"Well, what would be his object—we ain't got nothing he wants. Oh, I guess he thinks we're all right."

"Do you think *I* am all right?" my father asked. "And would you believe anything I might tell you, if it was reasonable?"

"You bet I would, Tommy—why?"

"Well, Jim, to-day when Weatherbee told you he wanted this well pronounced dry, it was not to guard off any gang of fellows from Pittsburg, but a devilish scheme to make the widow who owns this land believe that it is no good. According to the way he made her certain promises, this land will be his if there's no oil; so as soon as we say she is deep enough, he will then intrust this to a company with which his name will not be associated, the property drilled out, and the widow unable to redeem her right of royalty."

"Who in hell told you he talked to me to-day?" Boyd said, completely amazed at what my father had related.

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

"I am not in a position now to quote names, but in a few days, Jim, I will tell you how I learned what he said to you to-day, as you came through the Ashbaugh cave.

"Now, old man," my father continued, seeing he had the full confidence of his partner, "let us foil this damnable scheme; the other crew is yet in ignorance of it, and if we can go on a few days more, keeping Weatherbee in the dark as to how deep we are, we may strike oil before we get down seven hundred feet —see?"

"Tommy"—Jim spoke sincerely, "if this come from any one 'side you, I would call it a damn lie; but I am no fool when I gets my eyes open, and spud me if you ever hear of Jim Boyd getting tangled up in any such sand pumpings as this."

The two men clasped hands.

"If I had not been confident of your honesty of purpose," my father said, giving his hand a warm grip, "I would not have wasted my breath in telling you."

That night when my father came off tour, he told mother what had transpired between him and Boyd.

The next day while my mother was preparing dinner, Jim came to the house with his lantern and pail ready to go on tour again, and calling father to one side, he showed him a yellow telegram from Weatherbee which read, "Do nothing after this week on the 'Nelly'; will be detained here several days."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"You see, Tommy, we are up against it, oil or no oil, seven hundred feet or not, we must shut down at the end of this week."

My mother, overhearing his remark, turned from her work. "Don't despair yet," she said; "you have three days till Saturday; strain every effort to get deep enough in that time, and remember God is always on the side of right."

"We will, Mrs. Payne," Jim said, as the two men started off together toward the well, and from the time they reached the rig that day, to the hour of my father's death, they worked like beavers to reach the oil-bearing rock before the close of that never-to-be-forgotten week.

It was Saturday—the last day allowed them on the well, and the strain under which they had worked to accomplish its completion was showing in their faces and bearing.

Nina and her mother called about two o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Smedley brought some needle-work, and Nina had her doll. For a time we played together in the yard, then with several pieces of boards I made a play-house by a tree, where we "played house." I was the papa, she the mamma, and we became much concerned about one of our waxen children, who, mamma said, had been naughty. I took the doll to task. "If you run away any more," I said, shaking it, "I will whip you, answer me truthfully, yes or no—will you run away any more?" Assuming the answer to be "No," the little

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

mamma took compassion on her and said, "She'll be a good girl, papa; let us take her for a walk."

It was a beautiful Indian summer day; the sky was clear and blue, and the sun shone down through the half-naked trees, which were being rapidly stripped of their foliage by the nimble fingers of Jack Frost, the crisp, brown leaves lying ankle deep in the path.

Holding the doll by either hand between us, we started along, busily talking about the many things of which we had heard our parents talk, "grown up" talk, as no doubt thousands of children are doing to-day.

Reaching the fence, we crept between the rails into the field where the woodchuck was buried, and with our hands moulded the loose earth above its grave, and stood a flat stone on its edge to mark the head. That Carlo had robbed the grave, and cunningly covered it over, did not occur to us.

This done, we retraced our steps to the woods, and walked toward home. Suddenly as a flash of lightning might dart from a clear sky, we heard an explosion which shook the very earth, followed by a terrible roar. The noise made my young blood run cold. Nina dropped the doll, and clinging to my arm, screamed with fright.

Looking in the direction from whence it came, we saw a monstrous flame shoot above the trees, into the very heavens. Volumes of dense, black smoke rose high, spreading out till the whole earth seemed wrapped in gloom. Another flame, followed by another, shot

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

up, illuminating for a time the clouds of black smoke, hanging like a pall over us.

We stood watching the scene in terror. Thoughtlessly, I thrust Nina from me. "The well!" I gasped, and started on a mad run toward the house, ungallantly leaving my little playmate to follow.

Dashing into the house, expecting to cling to my mother, as a child in fear is wont to do, I found no one within. "Mam! mam!" I screamed at the top of my voice, but the unearthly noise coming from the burning well made my cry a whisper.

Out into the yard, frantic with the sense of impending danger, I flew back along the path toward where I had left my little companion, and saw her hurrying toward me, crying piteously.

Taking her hand, we ran down the path together, calling and crying for our mothers, when a big man in overalls ran by us. It was the man who had chased us from the oil puddle. Then more men ran by, and one of them stopped and told us not to cry, that we would not be hurt, then hurried on with the rest.

Coming to the house, we were mutually disappointed in not finding our mothers; down the hill leading toward the well we ventured after the crowd, but had gone only a short distance when we met some of the men coming back, carrying a black object, from which I saw blood trickling and dropping to the ground.

My mother was behind them, crying as though her





*"Looking in the direction from whence it came, we saw a monstrous flame shoot above the trees, into the very heavens."*

## MY FATHER'S AWFUL DEATH

heart would break. "Oh Tom, Tom! my poor husband, may God have mercy on you," she wailed.

Instantly I understood; my father had been burnt beyond recognition. It was his charred remains the men were carrying.

"Pap, pap—my own dear pap!" I cried, running to his side, when one of the men picked me up, and went on ahead to the house.

Into the low room of our humble dwelling they carried the silent form of my unfortunate father. Mrs. Smedley was trying to console my mother, but the tumult of grief within her own heart made her efforts feeble.

Crowds of men that I had never seen before stood around the yard, and their faces, as if moulded by a subtle hand, bore the same expression—the expression of sadness and awe.

Poor Boyd was among them; his hair and eyebrows were singed to the skin, and his face was black and blistered. The short-sleeved flannel shirt which he was accustomed to wear at work was burned to a crisp. His hands and arms, like his face, were discolored, and I saw blood ooze from under his finger nails; but unconscious of his pain, he hurried into the house and helped lay my father's body on the bed; then, tenderly, Mrs. Smedley drew a sheet over him, and closed the door.

The excitement grew intense. The flames and smoke drew people from miles around, and the expressions of sympathy toward me as the little boy

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

whose pap had been killed, diverted my mind from its channel of grief into a sense of pseudo-importance which, at my age, was pardonable.

Toward night the crowd dispersed. A few loitered, however, dividing their time between watching the well and talking to friends who were kind enough to remain with us that night.

Mrs. Smedley set about to dress Boyd's burns, whose eyes had swollen nearly shut. I heard him tell how it happened, and every one listened attentively while he spoke.

"I was heating a bit in the fire," he said, "and Tommy was turning the tools with a stick between the links of the clamps. He said something about not being able to get the 'jar,' and asked me to feel the rope. Pulling the bit out of the fire and swinging it on the anvil, I was just going to step to the rope, when the gas came with a rush.

"'Run!' I yelled, jumping from the lower side of the derrick floor, and as I jumped, the explosion struck me in the back, and for a moment I was covered with flames. Tommy went out on the upper side where the gas lay heavy against the hill. Had he followed me, he would have been safe. In trying to save his old comrade's widow from being cheated," he added, looking toward my mother, "he made a widow of his own wife."

## CHAPTER IX

### MY FATHER'S FUNERAL

THE day of my father's funeral a cold drizzly rain was falling, adding to the gloom which had already taken possession of our hearts. The road leading to St. Petersburg was rough, and the recent fall rains had softened the earth into deep mud.

There was no hearse; the remains were conveyed in a light spring wagon with a tarpaulin thrown over the casket. Nina and I were put in the back seat of a canopied wagon, where we prattled together as if the occasion was one of enjoyment.

Arriving at the little church, situated amid a grove of chestnut trees, a man lifted us out and set us down upon the steps in front. Then they carried the coffin in, and placed it upon four chairs near the minister, who stood before us holding a book in his hand.

After we were seated he offered up a prayer, in which he asked God to bless the widow and the little boy who had so suddenly been deprived of a loving husband and father. Four women that I had never seen before stood up by an organ and sang, "Nearer My God To Thee," and "What a Friend We Have In Jesus."

Something in the singing choked me with emotion,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

and I felt my little heart swell as though it would break. I thought of all the kind things my father had ever said to me, and I felt a sense of pressure, as though a heavy hand was tightening upon my breast.

I gave vent to my feelings in tears and cried throughout the services. When the women had ceased singing, the minister read a short chapter of Scripture.

“Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.

“In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succor, but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?”

Turning to us, and speaking soft and low, his words were full of comfort and sympathy. Young as I was they made a lasting impression upon my mind, and I shall never forget them.

“Dear friends,” he began, laying the Bible upon the stand beside him, “such occasions as these are sad ones, but in this instance, when in the twinkle of an eye, when in the space of a few seconds, a man is so suddenly and so fearfully snatched from our midst, we tremble in the contemplation of life’s uncertainty.

“In the bloom of health this unfortunate man left his home. In a little while he was brought back to the wife and child whom he loved so well, an unrecognizable mass of charred flesh.

“The grief and heart-aches, which must necessarily follow such a terrible calamity, will be hard to bear,

## MY FATHER'S FUNERAL

unless this bereaved widow and orphan boy place themselves in the arms of our Redeemer.

"Let me repeat the words of the hymn, 'What a friend we have in Jesus, All our sins and griefs to bear!' He alone can help and comfort them, and He will bear their grief and sorrow if they but turn to Him.

"God's ways are difficult for us to understand. Our little minds are not capable of grasping the workings of His infinite plans. From our birth He surrounds us in mystery, and as a test of our faith, He sends affliction in many ways.

"The sad and impressive lessons which death brings in time, to every one of us, is to turn us to Him by rebuking our pride, chastening our vanity, and making us ever mindful of the fact that our own stay in this life is equally short and uncertain. Everything in this life is perishable, but we must look to Him who changeth not, and hope for more beyond."

Out into the little cemetery joining the church-yard in front, he led the funeral cortege. Unmindful of the rain and mud, he stood beside the open grave, with the light of God reflected in his face. Nina and I stood beside him and peered curiously into the new-made grave. I was unable to understand how any one so far away from our home could tell my father was dead, and dig a grave for him.

"Isn't it a big one!" she half whispered; "hundred times bigger en the one we dug for the ground-hog." Overhearing her remark, the minister raised his

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

finger, and before I had time to reply, shook it slightly and whispered, "Hush!"

Looking to the opposite side, I was surprised to see Boyd, whose face and hands were covered with soft lint, but I could see that he was weeping. As my father's remains were being lowered to their last resting place, the faithful minister of God knelt upon the wet ground, and lifting his eyes to heaven said, "Let us pray."

In an instant every head was bowed. He prayed first for my mother, and then said: "And we pray Thee, our heavenly Father, to bless this little boy, that he may grow up to be a comfort and blessing to his widowed mother. Give him the strength of maturer years, that he may ere long be able to support her."

When he had concluded, I felt myself a changed being—a full sense of realization was upon me, and before I left the cemetery I secretly asked God to make me grow fast, so I could work for my dear mam.

In the years that followed, when fondest hopes were supplanted by bitter disappointments, with trials such as come to a boy cursed with ambitions beyond his reach, when I saw honest and faithful effort left unappreciated, or regarded as the vagaries of an idle dreamer, the remembrance of that sermon and prayer would bridge itself across the gulf of time, and as from a fountain, I would gather strength which enabled me to look with compassion upon those who were unable to understand me.

## CHAPTER X

### MY MOTHER

“Happy he with such a mother.  
Faith in womankind beats with his blood  
And trust in all things high  
Comes easy to him.”

THE news of the “Nelly’s” destruction by fire spread rapidly throughout the different fields of development, and as a useful lesson, was taken seriously to heart by every driller.

Mr. Weatherbee had gone to the scene of Butler County’s prospective territory, and was engaged in “leasing,” when the news of the fire reached him. The morning before he had driven out to see a farmer whose land, from surface indications, promised to be “on the belt.”

It was nearly noon the next day before he left the house of the farmer. As he drove back toward the town, one passing and receiving his habitual pleasant smile, would never have suspected that back of that smile was the cold venom of deception.

Yet he was gloating over the way he had duped the ignorant old farmer.

“It is mine,” he muttered to himself, patting his gloved hand over the pocket in which he carried the well-worded lease.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The contract was as clever as his selfish nature could invent, every line betraying his craft, and meant to take unfair advantage of the credulous farmer, whose lack of suspicion was due—not to a want of intelligence—but the honesty and truthfulness which has always characterized the farmer of western Pennsylvania.

"In case the first well was dry," it stated, "the party of the first part"—meaning the farmer, "was to receive one thousand dollars. If, however, oil in quantities sufficient to market was found," the farmer, or as the lease read, "the party of the first part was to have the one-tenth of all such oil produced and saved from said well."

Then came a stipulation in ink, a sort of reading between the lines that, "In case the well is tubed, and put to pumping fluid," without stating what kind of fluid, whether oil or water, "and does produce fluid," then "the party of the second part (meaning Weatherbee), would not pay party of the first part the one thousand dollars, but expend the same toward drilling more wells," and without stating where, or upon whose land.

Stopping to water his horse at one of the watering troughs, common along the highways of hilly Pennsylvania, where mountain springs of the purest water abound, he met a man who was just turning his horse from the drinking-place into the road again, and from the side pocket of whose coat projected the morning *Derrick*, in which was an account of the fire.

## MY MOTHER

Reining their horses so as to bring the buggy seats opposite, the two men commented upon the excellent spring flowing through a triangular spout of narrow boards into the trough.

"Tell you," said the leaser, "this country beats the world for good water." Weatherbee agreed, and in the same breath asked the other "if he was out for territory." "What company are you representing?" he asked further, having received an affirmative reply.

"Blue Grass Oil Company," the man replied courteously; "they say this is the direction of the streak, but I think it is all a matter of guess. First they thought and believed that no oil could be found away from the flats of Oil Creek; they reasoned that the oil followed the low spots; but now some of the largest wells are being found on the highest hills—why I see by this morning's *Derrick* that a big well was struck Saturday on the side of a hill near St. Petersburg, in Clarion County—it caught fire from the forge before the men had time to save themselves—it is estimated to be a thousand-barrel producer."

"Near St. Petersburg!" Weatherbee exclaimed, and wondering within his own mind if it could possibly be the "Nelly." "Who was the owner?" he asked, when he had partly recovered from the surprise.

"I merely scanned the account as given here," said the leaser, taking the paper from his pocket and handing it across the seats. "I must be hurrying on, but take the paper and look it over for yourself."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Thank you kindly," said Weatherbee, as the stranger picked up the lines and drove on.

Unfolding the paper, in big head-lines upon the first page he read,

"A Slump in the Market Expected. Big Well Brought in Near St. Petersburg which Opens up Another Rich Pool!"

"Well Catches Fire from Forge, Burning One Man to Death, and Another Seriously. The Well Still Burning, Shooting a Gigantic Fountain of Fire into the Heavens!"

Eagerly scanning the account which followed, he almost lost his breath when he saw it was his well on the widow Martin track. For a time he sat deep in thought. Only one solution to the problem suggested itself to his mind.

"The sand must have been prematurely reached, for Boyd would surely keep the secret." He bit his lips in selfish disappointment, and blamed himself for allowing them to work till Saturday—here it was Monday, and no doubt Boyd, or whoever survived, was trying to reach him by wire, and he out in the country over Sunday, attending meeting at the country chapel to impress his goodness upon the people.

"D—n the luck!" he muttered; "anyway it is a good well, and no one heard me promise Mrs. Martin a royalty; the land is mine, and I have the deed; a hundred or two will dispose of her. A thousand-barrel producer! Ah, Weatherbee! you will be a

## MY MOTHER

rich man now," and emphasizing the thought with a slap of his hand upon his thigh, he drove rapidly back to town, and boarded the first train for the burning well.

\* \* \* \* \*

How desolate a house seems after being unoccupied, even for a short time. The night after the funeral we were alone. When we returned from the cemetery it was late in the evening. The driver of the canopied wagon helped us out and drove away.

Entering the house it seemed wrapped in gloom, behind which some mysterious silence was hiding. Closing the door against the chill, damp air, my mother threw aside her wraps and lighted the lamp. A few live coals were smouldering in the stove, and with the dry pine kindling my father had brought home from the well, she soon had a cheery fire ablaze.

How quietly she moved! how sad, how lonely her face! When the fire was burning brightly she came to where I sat tugging at my boots to relieve my feet, and anticipating my wants, with the instinct of a true mother, as was always her delight, she pulled the boots from my damp feet, and set them behind the stove to dry.

Looking up into her face as she drew my chair closer to the stove, I saw she was in tears. "You darling," she said passionately, taking me in her arms and holding me on her lap, "you won't have a father's hand to guide you now."

As I cuddled my head against her breast, I could

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

hear the muffled throbbing of her breaking heart. Then, sighing heavily, she pressed me tightly to her bosom, and I thought she prayed. Reaching up, I put my hand on her face, and found it wet with tears.

For a time she sat motionless, still looking vacantly into the fire. I saw the light glisten upon her lashes. As night approached, an equinoctial storm arose and blew dolorously among the trees surrounding our dwelling. Gusts of wind came down the stovepipe, sending flame and smoke from every crevice of the stove. Then came a heavy downpour of rain, which sounded like hail upon our low roof.

The well below was still burning and flowing at intervals. Retiring for the night, we could see through the little slide window of our room the reflection of the flame as it shot defiantly upward into the dark, wet night.

The next day a gang of men set about to extinguish the fire and cap the well. Boyd was standing by, looking on. He came to the house about noon, and told us how much he liked my father. He seemed to be in good spirits, but he looked terrible with the white cotton on his face and hands. Inwardly, I was afraid of him.

"Weatherbee is back," he said, his voice sounding strange from the swollen condition of his lips, "and is trying to boss things. He looks beat; guess he'll have to do the right thing now with Mrs. Martin."

Toward evening we were surprised to see Weatherbee come to the house. He was very demonstrative

## MY MOTHER

in his expressions of sympathy. "This has been a very sad affair, Mrs. Payne," he said, "and I can assure you that you and your little son here," pointing to me, "have the heartfelt sympathy of myself and family."

My mother did not look up, but stood demurely before him. "I have the money here," he continued, "for the time your husband worked on the well, and as a friend I have added five dollars to it; in the name of the friendship which was so warm between your husband and me, I ask you to accept it."

This hurt my mother, and her eyes flashed a sudden dart of wounded pride straight at him. "If you will be so kind, sir," she replied, "as to give me just the amount he earned, I will thank you; beyond that, Mr. Weatherbee, you insult me by offering alms."

"I beg your pardon a thousand times, Mrs. Payne," he said quickly, his face flushing. "I am sorry to have you view it in that light, but surely the name of friendship is sacred; why then, not take it?"

"Because, sir, I do not want it."

"Ah, Mrs. Payne, your lofty mind was never intended to grapple with poverty. I have truly upon many occasions admired you, but never till this moment did I realize what a beautiful, proud-spirited woman you are. Forgive me," he said, laying his hand on her arm.

My dear, patient, self-sacrificing little mother,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

whom my father had never seen angry—she who had never lost her temper in dealing with my many boyish indiscretions, she whose goodness of soul was capable of penetrating the heart of this self-constructed, egotistical, pretending philanthropist, became now like one driven to desperation, as she wrested herself from him in righteous indignation.

How excited, how bewildered she looked! “Tom!” she screamed, unconsciously, then as if her own cry had brought her to her senses, she ran to the door, threw it wide open, and turning to Weatherbee, whose flushed face had now turned to pallor, demanded him to leave the house.

“Go! you miserable wretch, go! and for God’s sake, never come here again.”

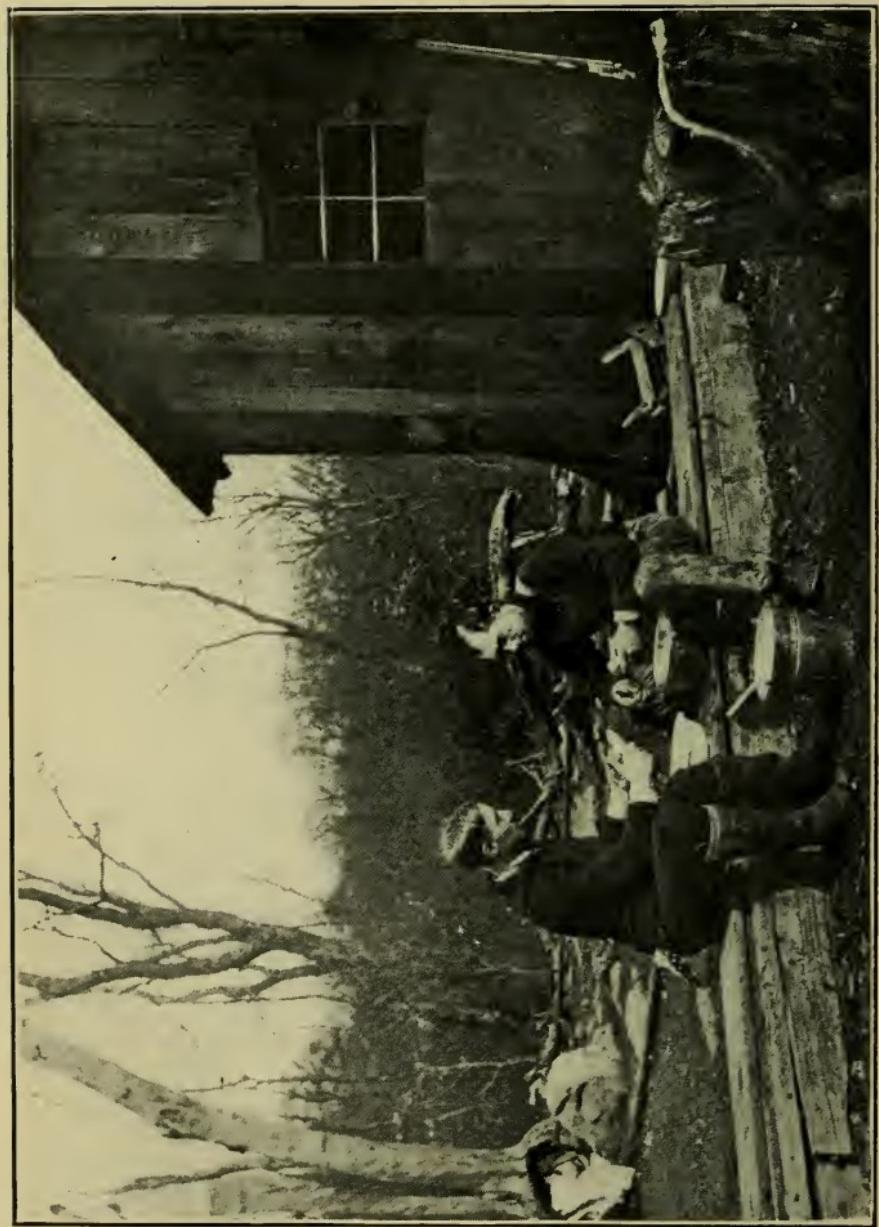
He tried to explain, but she would not listen. In her struggle to free her arm from his lustful grasp, her hair, becoming dislodged, fell from its place, and hung in loose folds about her face and neck. “Go!” she exclaimed again, throwing it back with her hand. “If *you* don’t, *I* will. Come Johnny, come here to me.”

Seeing it was useless to try to argue, he threw the money on the table and walked out.

New derricks upon the hill sprung up with mushroom rapidity. The drilling of the “Nelly” proved the theory that the oil-producing sand lay in streaks, running in a twenty-two and a half and a sixty-seven and a half degree line; and notwithstanding the winter weather which was beginning to tighten its



*Shanty life in the oil region. Preparing dinner on the steam-boil.*



## MY MOTHER

grasp upon everything outside, the work of development progressed rapidly.

The path through the field and woods, which I had trodden so many times in going to Nina's home, became covered with deep snow, and my visits were brought to an end. Then we learned from Boyd, who frequently called and did many little errands for us, that Mr. Smedley had moved his family away to a large town, and that his first venture as a "producer" had proved a fruitful one.

From a hard-working, poor pumper and driller, he was in a night transformed to wealth and renown; and like all others who had "struck it rich," immediately took his place among the chosen few, commonly dubbed "Oil Princes."

But how did *we* live? Ah, this question is hard to answer. But, thank God, there is no dishonor in anything except that which is dishonorable.

My darling mother washed—yes, washed over the tub from early Monday till late Saturday. But we were happy, as time wore on. Willingly I went among the wells, and carried home the clothes of the men who were living in emergency boarding-houses, or maintaining the shanty life so common at that time. In this way we wore the long winter through; and when at last spring came, and the warm sun had melted the snow, and the robins hopped about our yard once more, I ventured again over the favorite haunts where Nina and I had played so many times together.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The old leaves that had rustled about our feet the previous autumn now lay pressed into a heavy mat continuous throughout the woods, as the result of the weight of the winter's snow.

I went to the stump in the field to inspect the grave of the woodchuck, and found it had sunk deep below the surface, and the flat stone marking the head was partially buried by the action of the frost. With a sharp stick I sought the grave's occupant, but found it vacant. Carlo, who was with me, looked guilty, and I understood.

I then walked to the old house where my little playmate had lived, passing the same oil puddle where she and I, the summer before, had stopped to dabble. The same plank stretched across it, and in fancy I held her hand at the other side.

Reaching the house, it stared at me through its open door and windows with a sad-eyed expression. I looked into the low rooms—snow and ice lingered in one corner, and straw and papers lay scattered upon the floor. The windows had been taken out, doors down, and the walls, musty and mildewed, seemed to peer out at the grassy plot in front, as if to find companionship in the little ant mounds and sunken hollows. A feeling of desolation came over me. The disappointment of not seeing Nina was greater than I had anticipated. I thought of her as she looked the day we ate the fried-cakes together. “Nina!” I called imploringly, then started at the sound of my own voice.

## MY MOTHER

The spirit of true loneliness was upon me. As I jumped from the porch into the yard I caught sight of a white object partly hidden beneath an ash heap. I picked it up carelessly; it was the head of an old doll. With my coat sleeve I wiped the dirt from its face—it was the one with which we had played the day my father was burned. Involuntarily I kissed it—my grief now was real.

That little disfigured face, mere clay, found in my childish heart a place which, after years told me, had been made by the absence of the little girl I had learned to love.

Sleep refusing to come to my eyes that night, except in little snatches of slumber, made the night seem distressingly long. The doll's head I placed under my pillow. When morning broke, I arose fatigued and with swollen eyes. My mother, perceiving that something was weighing upon my mind, asked me to tell her what it was.

Reluctantly I admitted it was the absence of Nina. Drawing me to her side she put an arm lovingly around me and said, "That is the way of the world, dear boy; life is a series of trials and disappointments; some day perhaps you may meet her, and if you do, you cannot meet as playmates, so you and I must play together now."

## CHAPTER XI

### A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

**A**CROSS the little ravine and over the rounded top of the hill, cleared as I have said by the ax of an early German settler, sprung up in a night the magic town of Antwerp.

The little cluster of pumping wells which had been practically surrounded by a circle of dry holes, and supposed to mark the area of the "Petersburg field," now looked insignificant when their oil-besmeared derricks were compared in number to the new ones upon Triumph Hill, which the drilling of the "Nelly" had opened.

Farms and stony tracts of scrub timber sold at fabulous prices. A new street with its busy throng, and bevy of stores, saloons, and hotels, stood upon ground which but a fortnight before was a field of pine stumps.

Men of every description—rich and poor, honest and dishonest, stupid and intelligent, invaded the new town. Gambling dens flourished with open doors, and drunken brawls were an every-day occurrence, as there was too much excitement to think of discipline.

Restaurants, with ground floor, sky roof, and two boards laid side by side across two saw-horses for a table, flourished in the groves by the roadside.

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

The old "Pike," that for years had contented itself with the family wagon on its way to church or mill, now sustained two continuous lines of vehicles moving in opposite directions and bearing all manner of freight.

With the hard-earned money she had saved, my mother opened a small news-store in the town. The arrival of the stage from Foxburg each day brought us the daily papers from Oil City and Pittsburg, and these I sold upon the street.

Frequently, in making my rounds, I met Weatherbee, who would always stop me and buy a paper; and it seemed to me as he would say, "Keep the change, Johnny," that he was sorry for having offended my mother; yet while I tried, I found it impossible to make myself like him.

Like the baffled hound who circles aimlessly about after the scent and dashes ahead when the trail is finally found, so when the true belt had at last been discovered, a mad chase ahead for territory was indulged in by the inevitable "smellers" of oil.

At the head of "Turkey Run," another "wild cat" \* was brought in a gusher; it shared the fate of the "Nelly," and three men were burned to death. These two calamities, occurring so close together, became the topic of heated conversation among the men who owned and who worked on the wells.

\* Term given to a well drilled ahead of developments, or one drilled to test a certain locality regardless of any previous developments.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Across the street from our store the most prominent hotel was situated. It was here that most of my papers were sold. This day I lingered long after disposing of my stock, listening to the groups of men discussing the sad death of the three drillers.

Mr. Weatherbee and Boyd were among them, and frequently referred to the destruction of the "Nelly" and the death of my father. Toward the middle of the afternoon a stranger, whom I afterward learned was an owner in the "Turkey Run" well, joined the crowd. He had just returned from the scene of the accident.

"Gentlemen," he said, tilting his chair back against the wall and putting his feet upon the railing, "we shall have to do away with the use of casing, and return to the Drake method of drilling our wells. I hold, and I believe you will bear me out, that the lives of men are of more value and importance than oil wells."

"Yes," interrupted Mr. Weatherbee, "but we know now that the weight of the water keeps the oil back, and soon ruins the territory; personally, I am not in favor of condemning the use of casing, but we *must* do something to prevent these fatalities."

"Well," continued the stranger, "I have been around among the boys, and they have promised to meet this evening at nine o'clock in the 'Wolf' hardware store. Hope to see you all there to help settle the question."

"What kind of a meeting is this to be?" Weather-

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

bee asked. "An indignation meeting," the stranger replied, "to protest against the use of casing; it is the casing that is responsible for this loss of life."

Rumor of the meeting spread rapidly, and oil men from different fields came either to defend or condemn the use of casing.

After supper I went out on the pretense of selling a few papers, but with the intention of going to the hardware or rather the oil-well supply store—to hear what was to be said about preventing wells from catching fire.

Quite a number of men had gathered and were discussing the matter. Everything around the store was being utilized as a seat. The counter, nail kegs, casing-heads, coils of rope, tubing blocks, even to inverted pails of tallow.

Mr. Weatherbee rapped on the counter and called for order. "Gentlemen," he said, "we are now ready to have you appoint a chairman for this meeting." The man whom I had seen at the hotel rose and proposed Mr. Weatherbee.

Anxious to proceed, there was a unanimous "Aye," after which the new chairman called the meeting to order. On an unpacked bale of waste I sat, holding my papers and taking in all the men said regarding casing or no casing.

During the discussion, which after a time waxed warm, a man small of stature but possessing the head of an inventive genius, arose.

"Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen," he said, bowing

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

in different directions, "this, to me, is a very interesting meeting. I have listened to your arguments, and find that those of you who are protesting against the use of casing are as clear in your views as those who wish to continue its use.

"The facts as I see them are, that if it were not for the danger of the well flowing and catching fire, casing would be indorsed by you all. Am I right?"

Mr. Weatherbee nodded.

"Well then," he continued, picking up a package from a rack beside him, "since the burning of the 'Nelly' well belonging to our worthy chairman here, I have invented this device," undoing the package and holding up a model, "and for which I own a patent.

"This, gentlemen, when attached to the top of casing, will not only prevent fire, loss of property and life, but will save all the oil by directing it either into tanks or pits, as the owner may see fit to provide;" and holding the model high with one hand, he explained with the other the mechanism of the first oil saver.

Simple as it was, it readily appealed to the enthusiastic crowd of producers and drillers. Cheer after cheer went up. "Victor Gretter's head is level; he is all right."

When the meeting came to a close the crowd divided into groups, each one having an attraction in the form of some talkative land fellow who had to have his say. Some one asked for Gretter, but he was not to be seen.

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

During the confusion which followed the breaking up of the meeting Weatherbee had seized Gretter by the arm, and drawn him to one side, not far from where I was sitting on the waste. "You are a regular Robert Fulton," he whispered. "Come to my room in the hotel. I want to examine that model more closely."

In his own room, Weatherbee took the model in his hand and scrutinized it.

"Gretter," he said finally, "I, too, have lately thought out a similar device; it seems that 'great minds do run in the same channel;' you and I have frozen on to the identical idea. I must say, though, that my saver possesses points of advantage over yours, and think you will agree to it when you see my model."

It was now common gossip that Weatherbee had defrauded the widow Martin out of her royalty, but busy people, and especially people in a new oil community, had no time to dwell upon such rumors.

Gretter, however, being familiar with Weatherbee's tactics, believed the report, and laughed inwardly that the fellow was nervy enough to begin a plan whereby he might come in for a share of the profits of the oil saver, since it was recognized as a good thing. He said nothing, however, but watched him closely as he turned the model now this way, now that, as if to be sure of its every part before handing it back to its inventor.

"My saver has the screw here, and the packer seat

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

tapers instead of being straight like this. I think, Gretter, we had better retain the good points of each, and combine the two into one, and jointly apply for a patent. In this way we can keep the price up, and control our individual interest much better than to be competitors."

A rap on the door prevented Gretter from making reply.

"Come in," Weatherbee called, assuming his usual air of dignity.

The door opened, and the proprietor of the hotel stood before them. "Sorry to interrupt you," he said, "but here is a gentleman wishing to see you, Mr. Weatherbee," and stepping back he made way for the stranger to enter.

"Good evening, sir," said Weatherbee, addressing the latter. "Do you wish to see me?"

"Yes, sir. Have you the time for a private interview? I have been looking for you at the supply store, where I was informed you were presiding at some meeting."

Weatherbee scanned his visitor from under his heavy eyebrows. "That young Gould," he mentally soliloquized; "what can he want? I'll pretend not to recognize him."

"If this gentleman wishes to see me privately, I will have to see you again, Mr. Gretter; pardon my rudeness if I ask you to go," he said aloud.

"The pleasure was all yours, anyway," Gretter curtly replied, taking his model and leaving the room.

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

As he passed out he shot a quick glance at the newcomer, who stood, hands in pockets, firm and resolute, waiting the door to close.

With an acumen possessed by few men, Weatherbee was always able to anticipate the wants of those who had occasion to see him privately, and with a word fortify himself, so that the visitor was gently drawn into his own mood; which, apparently, was always pleasant and agreeable.

"Well, sir," Weatherbee began, when the door was closed, "whom have I the pleasure of addressing, and what can I do for you?"

"'Tis strange you should forget me so soon," Gould replied. "You remember my father and I bought a 'gold brick' from you a few years ago at Pit Hole."

"Why, Mr. Gould, I didn't recognize you—how do you do?" said Weatherbee, then, extending his hand promptly; but seeing that Gould paid no attention to it, he pretended to regard it as an oversight on his visitor's part, and placed a chair for him to be seated.

"I am glad to see you here, Mr. Gould," he said; "this place affords excellent opportunities for a man blessed with the ambition and hustle I know you to possess. How are things up in Venango?"

To answer Weatherbee's question meant a diversion from his purpose; instead, he opened upon him point blank, assuming the air of one who had been viciously wronged, and allowing his anger instead of his judgment to govern his tongue.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Mr. Weatherbee, I didn't come here as you pretend, to pay you a friendly visit, but to demand the money you stole from my father and myself. You robbed, you swindled, cheated, and defrauded us, on that property at Pit Hole," he exclaimed.

"You thought we were easy, and that you could jolly us aside, as you have others; but you reckoned without your host when you lied to us. You know that the sixteenth interest you sold to us in the 'Twin Wells' was the seventeenth sixteenth you had disposed of; and the well located below the Wiggin's Hotel, that you sold to us for fifty thousand dollars, never produced a drop of oil except what you had secretly run in during the night through an underground pipe-line.

"When we found ourselves duped by your wily tongue, my father set about collecting evidence to prove your dishonesty, and now, sir, we have it, and demand the money. It was a daylight robbery, you cannot deny it."

Unfortunately for Gould, he was tragic in his gestures; and from this Weatherbee knew that he was moved as much by emotion as by the actual loss of which he complained, and he instantly resolved to play upon the sentiment of his visitor.

When Gould paused, his face was red with the fit of anger into which he had worked himself. "Do you deny it, can you deny it?" he demanded, wiping the perspiration from his forehead.

Weatherbee stepped to his side, and gently placed

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

a hand upon his shoulder. "Why, Mr. Gould," he said, "I am surprised to see you lose your temper in this unnecessary way. Under ordinary circumstances I would eject a man from my room who would dare to accuse me as you have just done; but behind your rudeness, which I cannot believe you mean, I recognize a tone of sincerity and candor which I cannot help but admire. Come, why do you labor under such delusions? But I feel it my duty as a gentleman to listen to any grievance, be it real or imaginary." Resuming his seat, he looked straight at the New Yorker, who stood abashed before him.

"I must admit, sir," Gould replied, "that I have acted impulsively, and for this I beg your pardon. My visit here is to ask you to refund the money; my father, as I have said, has collected sufficient evidence to sustain our claim, and you must concede our demands to be no more than common justice."

It was several moments before Mr. Weatherbee replied. Then he said, "Both you and your father are doing me a great injustice by this procedure. I wish that Pit Hole had never been, for I lost money there, too; however, let us defer this talk till to-morrow, as I have some correspondence to attend to yet this evening. Where can I see you to-morrow?"

"I must have your answer to-night—father insists on it. He said to tell you, that as a matter of justice to you he gave you this chance, that you could guard, or rather save yourself from the public eye."

"For this extreme kindness, Mr. Gould," said

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Weatherbee, with a suspicion of sarcasm, "I am most thankful; but the 'public eye,' as you term it, has no terror for me. Right is right, and justice will always prevail. I am sorry for you both, but as God is to be my judge, you wrong me."

This appeal had the desired effect. Gould's heart went out to him; perhaps they were wrong, and how unjust, if they were. "Mr. Weatherbee," he said, "my father is not the kind of a man to harm any one. I shall wire him to come here and see you, himself."

"Do that, young man. I know he is a gentleman, and I am never afraid to meet a gentleman."

The next day when the stage bringing the mail and my papers arrived from Foxburg, a tall man of about fifty years, dressed in black, and wearing long side beard and mustache, stepped off.

As he alighted he gave his hand to a heavily veiled lady, and helped her to the ground. I saw the driver point with his long whip toward our store in answer to some question she asked, and then in the same way point out the hotel to the man.

It was Mrs. Martin. At first my mother, on account of the veil, did not recognize her. Throwing it back from her face, Mrs. Martin came in and kissed my mother, as though they had always been life-long friends. Taking her wraps, my mother placed a chair for her beside the front window of the side room, where we had our private apartment. Seating myself upon the floor, I took to folding my papers, ready for my round.

## A MEETING OF INDIGNATION

"I felt I must call on you, Mrs. Payne," said Mrs. Martin; "I have thought of you so many times since your husband's death. I know what it means to be left alone. May God spare your boy to you," she added, looking at me and smiling sweetly.

"A young lawyer at St. Petersburg," she continued, "has interested himself in my behalf, and assures me that I am entitled to a pension. Incidentally, I mentioned you to him, and he says that you too have sufficient grounds to file a claim."

"But Mr. Payne was not killed in the service," my mother interrupted.

"That, he says, will make no difference; you are the widow of a soldier."

"If this is true," my mother replied, "I would feel there would be a chance to educate my boy as I would like—for what chance has a boy unless he is educated? Education, to my mind, brings out the better man, and curbs the natural tendencies for evil, by making the higher brain ruler over the lesser one; that is, if a man has been taught to reason, he is less liable to rely upon experience to determine results."

"I am to see him to-morrow," Mrs. Martin said, referring to the lawyer. "God only knows what I will do if he fails, for my health is gone, and to go to a county house would kill me."

"But," my mother asked in surprise, "will not your oil royalty enable you to live comfortably?"

"My oil royalty," she repeated. "Why, Mrs.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Payne, I have no oil royalty. I had to sell it; didn't you hear?"

Mother shook her head negatively.

"Well, after the 'Nelly' was capped and put to pumping, it produced a much smaller amount than was expected. Some of the men who were interested with Mr. Weatherbee refused to drill any more wells unless they could own the property in fee, and acting on Mr. Weatherbee's advice, I sold the royalty for five hundred dollars."

"He is a——" my mother caught herself, and paused, leaving the sentence unfinished.

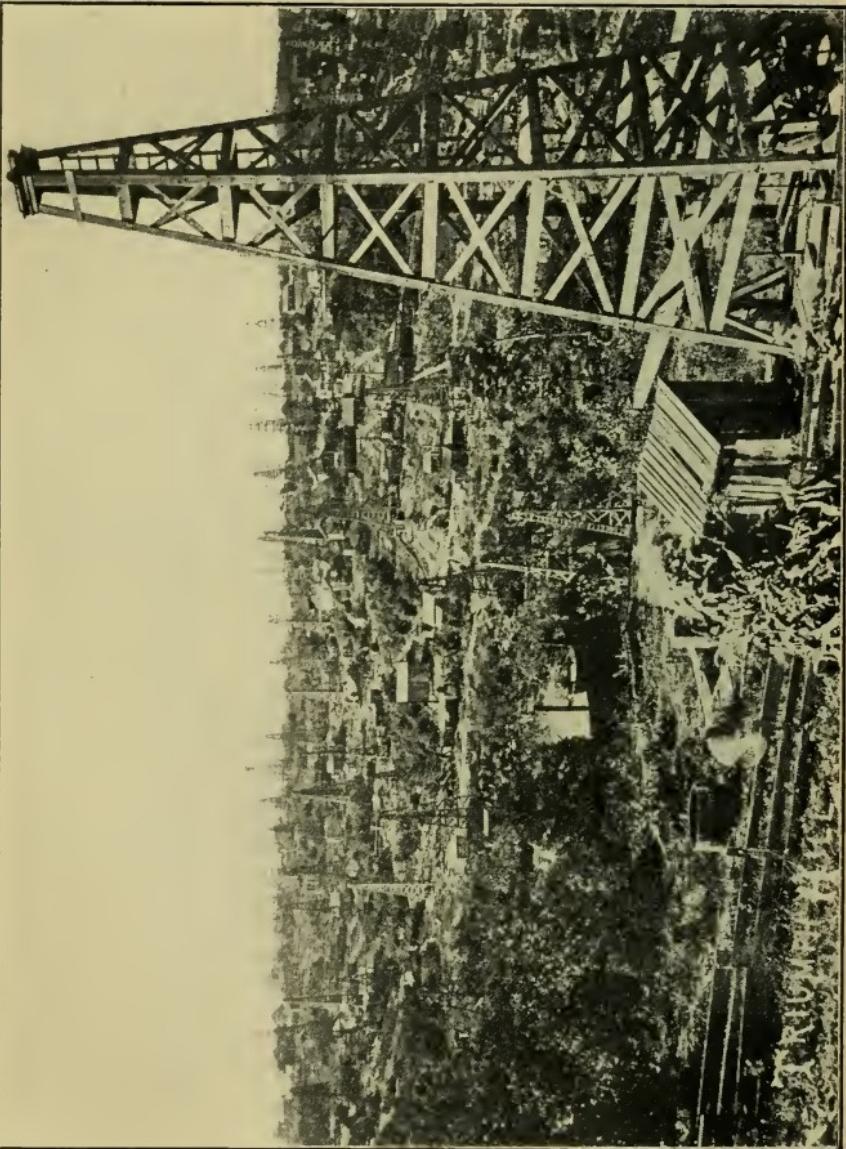
"What?" Mrs. Martin asked.

"Very smart man," she concluded.

For a time neither spoke, but watched me as I folded and stacked my papers on the floor.

"Sometimes," Mrs. Martin said, "I have thought he dealt unfairly with me; I hope I am wrong, but if he has some day he will fail, for dishonesty can never prosper long."





*Triumph Hill.*

## CHAPTER XII

### PIT HOLE, "THE CITY OF MAGIC"

WHEN young Gould's father left the stage coach—for it was he who had assisted Mrs. Martin to alight—he walked directly to the hotel, where his son and Mr. Weatherbee awaited him.

Mr. Weatherbee greeted him cordially, and led the way to his room. As soon as the door was closed the elder Gould began the conversation, endeavoring to mask his feelings by assuming a calm, quiet tone.

"Mr. Weatherbee," he said, "I hope you will not compel me to proceed with this matter; you cannot imagine how distasteful it is to me, and I sincerely trust we can adjust our little affair without the assistance of the courts. I have never figured in a legal suit, and really do not care to begin now."

Mr. Weatherbee bowed. "Our feelings are mutual on this point," he said, "for I, too, detest contention; and besides, Mr. Gould, your grievance against me is an imaginary one."

"An imaginary one!" the younger man broke in, giving his lip a sarcastic curl; "I consider it quite a stern reality, to sink fifty thousand dollars in a mud-hole."

By this time Weatherbee had collected his forces

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

and was prepared to meet his opponents with all the craft with which his wily nature was endowed; and, conscious of his power, he knew there was no necessity for haste, so he listened patiently and respectfully to the accusations of his visitors.

When they had reached their conclusions a pause ensued; and after silence of several minutes, Mr. Gould turned to his son and asked if anything had been omitted.

"I think," the latter replied, addressing Weatherbee, "that we have made our position clear. Now sir, what have you to offer? You promised to convince us that we were wrong."

"I am quite sure of it," said Weatherbee, rising from his chair—Weatherbee always stood when he wished to be impressive. "Now, gentlemen, let us first consider the cold facts of the case—not what has been told by outsiders, or concocted by unscrupulous lawyers, but the facts as they are. In justice, you know, nothing but facts can be considered.

"Now let me give you, in facts, the argument I know will convince any sane man; and what I shall say will be without prejudice, and for no other reason than setting forth the facts as I know them to be.

"If you had been the only ones to lose money at Pit Hole, there might be some reason in believing as you do; you know, however, that hundreds of men got swamped.

"Pit Hole, the city of magic, built upon a vein of hope, went up like a rocket, and fell—as most of us

## PIT HOLE, "THE CITY OF MAGIC"

did who went there—like the stick. History never has, and probably never will record such mad stampeding by human beings as was done at Pit Hole—and for what? Money. It was truly the chase to the end of the rainbow—the vagaries of those who were surrounded by the hot desert of speculative strife.

"The value of oil lands was reckoned by millions—even small interests in single wells brought hundreds of thousands of dollars. Men from New York, Philadelphia, Boston and Chicago measured purses in the insane rush for territory, and stocks of countless petroleum companies were scattered broadcast over Europe and America. Think of it, gentlemen, the post-office at Pit Hole ranked third in Pennsylvania, Pittsburg and Philadelphia alone exceeding it.\*

"I bought an interest in the Frazier well,† known as the United States Oil Co., when she had increased from one to eight hundred barrels per day; but this increase was the beginning of the end, for I never realized fifteen cents on the dollar. Of course, many came penniless to Pit Hole who returned with considerable wealth; but the great majority of those who came with plenty of money, returned empty-handed, but wiser-headed.

"During the death struggle of the place, which, as

\* "Sketches in Crude Oil," by Joe McLauran. Page 175.

† First well drilled at Pit Hole, 1864. This well began to yield one barrel per day, but rapidly increased to eight hundred barrels per day.—A U T H O R .

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

you know was brief, many rumors were afloat about tricks similar in character to the one of which you accuse me; but never, to my knowledge, was one verified. For instance, they accused an old lady—a widow at that—of pouring oil into her spring, then selling her farm for a fabulous price, claiming the spring had always yielded oil.

“Another report went the rounds of two fellows carrying bucketsful of sand from a good well, arranging it in piles on a plank stretched across the forge of a dry one, smuggling oil into the hole through an underground pipe, and selling the well to a ‘tenderfoot’ from Chicago.

“Then one—which to me was the wildest—of two fellows who, when they found their well was dry, shut the rig down by breaking the cylinder of the engine; and at this juncture one of the fellows was called home by a bogus message to attend the funeral of his mother-in-law, and he wired back to his partner that the dear old lady’s estate was so badly tangled up that he would be unable to return, and to sell his interest in the well. The purchaser found he had paid twenty-five thousand for a half interest in a ‘bunko.’

“So, I am not surprised that your claim, as you call it, is based upon just such rumors. For my part, I am satisfied that the whole thing was a bubble. I paid my money, and lost too, but I am blaming no one.”

Mr. Weatherbee resumed his seat, and taking a

## PIT HOLE, "THE CITY OF MAGIC"

large wallet from his breast-pocket, opened it, and withdrew a newspaper clipping.

"Gentlemen," he said, "here is a little poem I culled a few days ago from the *Oil City Times*, composed by John J. McLaurin, with whose name no doubt you were familiar during your Pit Hole experience. I think it pretty nearly tells the tale. It is entitled, 'Pit Hole Re-visited.'

'Not a sound was heard, not a shrill whistle's scream,  
As our footsteps through Pit Hole we hurried;  
Not a well was discharging an unctuous stream  
Where the hopes of the oil-men lay buried!

'We walked the dead city till far in the night—  
Weeds growing where wheels once were turning—  
While seeking to find by the struggling moonlight  
Some symptoms of gas dimly burning.

'No useless regret should encumber man's breast,  
Though dry-holes and 'Pit holes' may bound him;  
So we lay like a warrior taking his rest,  
Each with his big overcoat 'round him.

'Few and short were the prayers we said,  
We spoke not a sentence of sorrow,  
But steadfastly gazed on the place that was dead  
And bitterly longed for the morrow!

'We thought as we lay on our primitive bed,  
An old sand-pump-reel for a pillow,  
How friends, foes, and strangers were heartily bled  
And ruin swept on like a billow!

'Lightly we slept, for we dreamt of the scamp,  
And in fancy began to upbraid him,  
Who swindled us out of our very last stamp—  
In the grave we could gladly have laid him!

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

“We rose half an hour in advance of the sun,  
But little refreshed for retiring!

And feeling as stiff as a son of a gun,  
Set off on a hunt for some firing.

“Slowly and sadly our hard-tack went down,  
Then we wrote a brief sketch of our story  
And struck a bee-line for Oil City’s fair town,  
Leaving Pit Hole alone in its glory!

“That’s the ‘whole thing’ in poetry,” Mr. Weatherbee said, smiling, and laying the clipping on the table, “but for every dollar I lost at Pit Hole I expect to make a hundred here.

“Mr. Gould, these are facts. Pit Hole to-day is obsolete. Not your wells, or my wells, but every well, with one or two exceptions, has ceased to yield. A city of thirty thousand, erected in a fortnight, lives a few months, and passes out of existence forever. Put these unmerciful facts before any intelligent jury, and your ‘so-called claim,’ would be laughed out of court.”

For several moments father and son sat casting alternating glances toward each other. They were not convinced, for each felt that he had been the victim of fraud, yet, viewing it in the light Weatherbee had just cast around the affair, they knew it would be difficult to overcome the facts.

After a pause, during which Weatherbee remained unmoved, the elder Gould addressed his son, but kept his eyes on the other while he spoke.

“Well, I guess we will drop the matter. I feel satisfied my claim is just, but as Mr. Weatherbee

## PIT HOLE, "THE CITY OF MAGIC"

says, nearly everybody lost at Pit Hole, and sir," he said, addressing Weatherbee, "I will go to my grave believing that you wronged me. I will admit that you have convinced me that a suit, on my part, would be folly, but you could never convince me that your tactics at Pit Hole were honorable."

For an instant Weatherbee turned pale, but his wonderful power of self-control was soon evident, and he betrayed not even a sign of annoyance.

"If I have not convinced you, Mr. Gould," he said, "that I am an honest man, then sir, I demand a suit; for if you are frank enough to tell me yourself that I am not, you certainly would not hesitate in communicating the same to others, and that would be attacking my character.

"So for no other reason than to satisfy a personal pride, begotten by honest effort and dealings, I insist on your placing your claim in court, and if, as I know, you cannot prove your claim, then no one can reproach me. Justice and right is all I ask."

This sudden and eloquent appeal for a character which had long been protected by stratagem and cunning, touched the younger Gould, whose emotions were constantly swaying him in all directions. Turning to his father, he exclaimed, "I really believe, father, we are doing Mr. Weatherbee an injustice, and for my part I am sorry; you know it was all hearsay to us; let us drop the matter by extending to this man the hand of good fellowship—you know, father, it is a great wrong to injure a man's name."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Weatherbee in an instant was beside the young man with outstretched hand.

"The boy is father of the man," he said, shaking his hand warmly. "Young man, I thank you for this expression of good will. God knows your words have touched me. Mr. Gould, your son is a true gentleman; would to God I had such an one!"

## CHAPTER XIII

“HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY”

**B**EFORE the Goulds left him, Weatherbee showed the two gentlemen over his oil possessions, stopping long enough at each well to point with pride to the rich streams of green, foamy oil spurting from the lead pipes into the tanks.

“These are analogous,” he said, waving his hand toward the flowing oil, “to so many streams of green-backs pouring into your bank account.”

That evening, when the Goulds took their departure, it was with a keen desire to try the oil business again.

Having seriously considered his position, and the dangers connected with the risks he was daily assuming, Weatherbee arose one night from a restless bed, and dressing himself, sauntered over the hill in the direction of his wells.

A slight breeze blowing from the river valley bore to his ears the monotonous creaking of the turning wheels and moving pitmans. Reaching the boiler-house, he found his pumper seated outside under a large gas flambeau, amusing himself by watching some toads devouring the bugs that had scorched their wings in the flame above.

“Well, William,” he said, coming into the light,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"are you studying entomology? You certainly have a fine collection here."

Entomology, however, was beyond poor William's comprehension. He knew it was a big word, and to his mind its use was limited to people of Weatherbee's education or calibre, so in reply, he merely grunted a negative reply, and rising from his seat went into the boiler-house to try the water. Weatherbee followed him, and seated himself in the pumper's chair in front of the door.

"Bring me your gauge book, William," he said, "I want to see how they are holding up." Taking the book, he began computing the measurements of each day to ascertain just how rapidly his income was declining.

Several months had now elapsed since the new town of Antwerp had sprung into being, but like hundreds of similar oil towns, it came, like the marvelous career of Napoleon, "To rise, reign, and fall to rise no more."

The struggle that the oil towns had for existence was tragical, to say the least. True it was that small cities disappeared from certain localities, but only to re-appear in new ones, and under other names. The same crowd, with a few exceptions, furnished the population for some hundred different towns.

When a big strike was made at the "front," the crowd soon appeared upon the scene, and another town flourished at the expense of its predecessor. So when Dog Town, Turkey City, and Edenburg suc-

## "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY"

ceeded each other, Antwerp had dwindled to a few houses, and soon returned to its former field of stumps.

The wells were drilled so thickly, and within so short a time, that Nature's grand reservoir was soon exhausted, and operators were abandoning their possessions and following up what they pleased to term, "The excitement."

As Weatherbee sat comparing his statements, he was asking himself the question which was perplexing many others. "Why don't they hold up?" and commenting, "At this rate, they will be dry by another year."

Replacing the guage book he turned to his pumper and beckoned him outside where the noise of the boiler and engine would not interfere with conversation.

Peering into the darkness beyond to assure himself that no one was within hearing, he asked if the siphon was still a success. For a moment the pumper made no reply.

"As a siphon," he said finally, "it is, but as a scheme to steal oil, I'm afraid it will get us into trouble." A slight pallor came over Weatherbee's face; he paced up and down several times under the light, then sat on the box from where William had been watching the toads.

He did not like the way the word "steal" sounded; it grated harshly upon his ears. Raising his finger in warning, he said, "Don't talk so loud; what have you been hearing, something?"

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"I have, and I haven't," the pumper replied, "but the new gauger hangs around as if he suspected we had a siphon, and the last time I was actually afraid to go near it, and allowed the tank to run out without even so much as turning my eyes in the direction of the secret valve."

Prior to the consolidation of the various Pipe Line Companies, who, at that time, were refining the oil, the producer sold his oil to the company who would pay the highest price for it; and as a result of this bidding and over-bidding, it frequently happened that the refiner who had paid the most for his crude would be compelled to confront a lower market for refined oil than he had anticipated, and in order to make a profit he was forced to manufacture an inferior grade of illuminating oil, and enter it for market as "A No. 1 oil."

This under-stilled commodity was forced upon an unsuspecting public, and when it reached the lamp of the consumer it wrought havoc in many homes. Accounts of exploding lamps, killing and burning people by the score, were reported from various sections of the country.

Popular prejudice arose against the use of the 'oil lamp,' many going back to the primitive candle and 'dip' of their fathers.

Notwithstanding these calamities, the dishonest refiner determined that his business should thrive, kept forcing his death-dealing product upon the people, till finally the government stepped in and

## "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY"

placed expert oil inspectors between the refiner and consumer.

It was rumored in a few cases that the government officers were controlled by bribery, but the majority were loyal to their trust, and as a result the unscrupulous refiner was forced to either go into bankruptcy or merge his business into a combine.

Practically, this was the confused state of affairs when John D. Rockafeller, with his wonderful executive ability, conceived the idea of organizing the companies under one head and making every detail so complete that fraudulent competitors could not exist.

Accordingly he succeeded in procuring a joint meeting of the surviving concerns, and after much discussion they fused themselves into the "United Pipe Line Co."

This company to-day is one of the strongest divisions of the Standard Oil Trust, and with the masterly brain of Mr. Rockafeller at its head, the U. P. L., as it became known, rapidly grew into favor.

Its motto was: "Fair and square dealings with both producer and consumer." Rockafeller insisted that no company, no matter how ambitious, could prosper for any length of time unless it persistently adhered to clean, fair, and honorable dealings.

This marked the era of safety to the consumer, for every barrel of oil placed on the market by the new company bore a stenciled statement of its quality, and in this way the purchaser knew just what he was

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

getting, and the exploding of lamps became a thing of the past, not one having been reported, as a result of the Standard Oil Co. having maintained an honest policy which, to this day, has never declined.

It didn't take long, however, for them to learn that their producer friends had no fixed code of ethics.

So in order to weed out the dark sheep, spotters, or scouts as they were called, became as numerous as revenue officers through the "Moonshine" districts of the south, and it was one of these to which Weatherbee's pumper had reference, when he said the siphon, as a stealing method, was a failure.

Many court records to-day will bear evidence of the siphon, put in place, as were the mountainer's distilleries, by the light of the moon. A secretly buried pipe, connecting the tank with the casing of the well, was so fixed that a secretly hidden valve could be opened at a time when the Standard was running the oil into one of their lines; thus smuggling oil back into the well, to be pumped out and sold again as soon as the tank was re-filled.

Weatherbee had too many financial ambitions to be caught with such a device, and dragged into court, so he ordered William to disconnect it that night; and on the pretense of a leaky tank, ordered it taken down and moved to a more dependent point.

He knew a marked decrease in his production would inevitably follow the discarding of the siphon, so some other means must be figured out, as it was too much like killing the goose of golden egg fame.

## "HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY"

It was not long till his active brain hit upon another scheme, and he laughed as he thought how free from risk his new plan of thieving would be. The Standard's refineries were now running night and day, and enormous quantities of benzine, which at that time was regarded as a useless by-product, were being sold at a mere nothing to get it out of the way.

Weatherbee's new venture was to buy benzine in large amounts, store it in a tank provided for that purpose, and run it by night into the wells, where it would mix with the parafine and oil sufficiently to darken it to the color of crude oil, and then sell it for real petroleum.

For several months he continued to buy benzine at fifty cents per barrel, color it, and sell it for four or five dollars.

The Standard again had a problem to solve, as some of their stock oil shrank to an alarming extent; experts and chemists were put to work, and as a result the price of benzine was placed on a par with crude.

Foiled again—he thought of many things that might prove a remedy, but each involved a risk too great to be assumed.

After much deliberation he concluded the best thing to do was to sell his property before the benzine was exhausted. Sure, his wells had a good record, and he still had sufficient benzine on hand to stimulate matters during several weeks of negotiating.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Remembering the eager look on Gould's face the day he left after viewing the property, he wrote him a letter, asking him to try to sell his property, as certain matters made it necessary for him to dispose of it.

Several days later, Mr. Gould, with other capitalists, came out, and after looking over the statements furnished by the Pipe Line Co., and seeing how beautifully the wells were spouting out their unctious streams, Weatherbee soon transferred his oil property to the eager buyers for the handsome sum of five hundred thousand dollars.

"You will find no underground or secretly buried pipes here," he said. "These wells have produced more oil than any of their number in the country, and if it were not for my wife's ill-health, money would not buy them."

Feeling now that Clarion County possessed no further attractions for him, he moved his family to Oil City, the metropolis of the oil industry, and devoted his time between "watching developments," and "Bucking the Tiger," at the Oil Exchange.

## CHAPTER XIV

### A YOUNG PUMPER

NOTWITHSTANDING the fondness I possessed for sport, my boyhood, from necessity, was reckoned by few years.

The young attorney who had pressed Mrs. Martin's pension claim interested himself in behalf of my mother and succeeded after strenuous efforts in securing for her the generous sum of six dollars per month; and this, with the income of her little store, and judicious management, was ample to supply our humble needs.

It was several weeks after Mrs. Martin visited us at Antwerp that she persuaded my mother to accompany her to the office of the attorney. Weatherbee, who was arranging the transfer of his oil property, was talking to the lawyer when they entered.

Seeing who it was, he rose from his chair and bowed graciously. He addressed my mother kindly, but did not offer his hand as he did to Mrs. Martin. In no way did he refer to the land which she formerly possessed, and which had yielded him a handsome profit; perhaps he felt an uneasiness concerning their mission to an officer of the law.

Of course his anxiety was in no way manifest, but knowing in his heart that his title would not stand investigation, he winced at their presence.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"I have induced Mrs. Payne to apply for a pension," Mrs. Martin volunteered. "What, in your opinion, Mr. Weatherbee, will be her prospects?"

This put his mind at ease; nothing relative to land, of his unfair dealing, had brought her to seek legal advice; that she still believed in him was apparent.

"I am sure her chances, as well as yours, Mrs. Martin," he quickly added, "are exceedingly good." Then addressing the lawyer, he said: "Mr. Wright, I want you to do your utmost for these two women, and if funds are wanting, I will consider it a pleasure to be called upon. Mrs. Payne's husband lost his life in my employ, and I deem it a duty to do what may be in my power for his widow."

"File your claims," he said, addressing Mrs. Martin and my mother again, "and in the meantime I shall write to our Congressman, who is a personal friend of mine, and who will, I know, lend us a helping hand."

"Isn't he kind!" Mrs. Martin said, when he had gone. To this my mother made no reply, for she hated deception, and to answer affirmatively would be contrary to her belief, so she remained silent.

Unlike other oil towns, St. Petersburg had taken on a substantial growth, and the following autumn we moved there, my mother believing it a better location for a business such as she was conducting.

It was there I first attended school. Frequently we visited the cemetery where my father was buried, and as frequently I saw my mother stand beside

## A YOUNG PUMPER

that modestly-cared-for grave, and shed bitter tears of grief. Would to God that all affection of this world were as true as hers!

Having other boys to play with now, I soon acquired much of the waywardness common to "town" boys, and in consequence became a source of constant anxiety and worriment to my mother by absenting myself from her presence.

During the summer months, my time was spent with a gang of boys who saw nothing in life but going fishing, swimming, and performing all manner of destructive pranks, and which, in my case, were regarded as early manifestations of criminal tendencies within.

"That boy will never come to any good," was a frequent prognostication of the dear old ladies who took it upon themselves to instruct my mother as to how she should bring me up; but being her boy, and her only boy, she did not believe their predictions, although they annoyed her I am sure.

Returning at an earlier hour than usual one Saturday afternoon from an expedition of boyish investigation, I saw Mr. Fink, a gentleman who owned a number of wells along the river, standing before our door and talking earnestly to my mother.

Before they were aware of my presence, I caught a fragment of their conversation.

"I am not telling you this, Mrs. Payne," the stranger was saying, "to make you feel badly, or to discourage you regarding your boy, but that you may

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

know his actions, and restrain him from those daring feats which are liable to result in his death, for he is the most venturesome lad I ever saw."

A feeling of depression seized me. True, I had been venturesome, because the boys had dared me, but what boy wants his mother to be told of his foolish pranks?

My first impulse was to enter a vigorous denial. This procedure had convinced my mother in my favor before, why not now?

But she called me to her in a tone which I had never heard her use before.

With drooping head, and a conscience swelling with guilt, I awaited results. I felt that the man was scrutinizing me closely, and that he regarded me as a very bad boy.

He placed a hand gently upon my shoulder. I felt myself shrink beneath his touch. "Young man," he said pleasantly, "I have just been telling your mother that if she doesn't keep close watch over you you are going to kill yourself."

"How?" I asked timidly, after a brief hesitation.

"How?" he repeated; "by the way you are climbing the derricks, riding the walking-beams, cutting down old sand-pulleys, and standing—as I saw you yesterday—on the very top of the crown-block—goodness! some day a gust of wind will blow you off, and then where'd you be, eh?"

"Johnny, why are you so naughty?" my mother added, in a distressed voice; then turning to Mr.

## A YOUNG PUMPER

Fink, she continued, "He was such a good boy till we moved to town, and he got playing with bad youngsters. Aren't you ashamed?" she said, addressing me again.

"Well, Mahlon Martin dared me to, and when you don't take the dare," I said, with an air of justification, "the boys call you cowardy, and I ain't no cowardy."

"Oh! oh! I see," said the gentleman, nodding his head as if he was just beginning to understand my position. This gave me courage, but before I could explain further, he said, "Well, then, I will dare you to cut off your head, and if you don't, I will tell all the boys that you didn't take the dare."

This phase of it enabled me to see the absurdity of my excuse, and having no further means of defence, I began to cry. My spirits were crushed. That I had been terribly bad, dawned upon my mind. My heart beat violently, sending the hot blood to my face.

No boy loved his mother more dearly than I, and what pained me most was her expression of despair when my excuse of being "dared" was in itself an acknowledgment of my wild conduct.

"Don't cry," she said, gently, and drying my tears with her apron; "I won't punish you this time."

Immediately I knew she misunderstood my tears. I had no fear of punishment; but was sorry that I had grieved her, and unintentionally, by acts performed

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

for no other purpose than to please the gang and escape their dub of "cowardy."

I had kept my eyes upon the ground, but now I looked up and stared defiantly at the man who I felt had cast a gloom over our home. "You just mind your own business, you old tattle-tale," I blubbered out, rubbing my knuckles into my eyes, and crying the harder.

My remark evidently amused him, for he broke into laughter and patting me gently on the head said, "All right, Johnny, but you are too good a boy to be killed; besides, your mother will need you in a few years, so just quit your climbing derricks and going down conductor-holes, and I will 'mind my own business.' "

This was a new revelation. A few days before I had displayed my braggart inclinations by suffering the boys to lower me, with rope and bucket, down thirty feet to the bottom of a newly dug conductor-hole.

How much more of my private life he knew, I knew not; but to parley longer might disclose too much, for I felt he knew the secrets of my very soul. The facts were on his side, and moreover, I could see that he was as anxious for my welfare as it was possible for an outsider to be.

I fled from their presence, and aimlessly started over the hill toward the river. My only thought was, "What could I do to redeem myself in the eyes of my mother?"

## A YOUNG PUMPER

Down the hill I wandered along the tortuous path, till I found myself standing upon the "swimming rock," from whose rounded edge I had many times dived into the clear water which eddied around it. I sat upon its water-smoothed top, and gazed out over the gloomy surface of the river.

A pensive quietness gradually settled around me. As twilight approached the water took on an inky hue, adding a loneliness to the scene. Now and then a great bass would dart out, making a loud splash.

An hour passed, and my anger and remorse subsided. I ceased to think of what had just happened, and gradually fell to thinking the thoughts I was wont to think whenever occasion placed me upon that rock.

Notwithstanding the nearness of night-fall, I mechanically doffed my clothes and plunged into the water. How warm it seemed in contrast with the cool evening air! After doing all my water tricks, which were floating, swimming on my back, treading water, and diving to the bottom for pebbles, I crawled up the slippery side of the rock and hurriedly dressed.

Homeward, the way seemed long. Evening rapidly merged into night, and as darkness deepened I became conscious of once more having transgressed the wishes of my mother. At frequent intervals I thrust my fingers through my hair to insure dryness before coming into her presence.

Being Saturday night, my mother was kept busy till late; she saw me come in, but said nothing.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The next morning she took me to church. It was the same little chapel from where my father had been buried. After services we walked into the cemetery and stood by his grave. The day of the funeral, with all its associated memories, came back to me, and mentally I picked out the place where Nina and I had stood together looking into the grave. I looked at my mother—she was on the very spot where the minister had knelt and prayed.

That part of his prayer in which he had asked God to bless me, and the secret request I had made of Him to "make me grow fast," were forced back into my mind, and stole into my conscience with such a mild sympathy and repentance that I asked myself the question, "Has He blessed me?" Then reflecting a moment over my bad conduct, including the many falsehoods I had been telling my mother, I concluded that so wicked a boy was not worthy of God's blessings.

I remembered, too, that even Nina had deemed me cruel, and with an exaggerated idea of my sins I again resolved to be good, for something told me I was getting too big for such conduct.

It seemed strange, indeed, that my mother mentioned no word concerning Mr. Fink, nor of the complaints he had made regarding me; and strange did it seem to her that never after I left her presence without permission.

That I was getting to be a big boy, grew upon my mind each day. Constantly I found myself taking

## A YOUNG PUMPER

on the ways of the men with whom I was familiar, and who had impressed me most favorably. School no longer possessed any interest, but seemed boorish and stupid. I cared no more for the games, and longed for the day when I would be big enough to pump wells.

To be a pumper, and manage a boiler and engine, seemed the height of my ambition. Indeed, could I not pump now? On several occasions I had watched and fired the boiler while the men pulled the rods and changed the cups.

The next summer the zenith of my ambition was attained. Mr. Fink, who I believed had never forgiven me for my rudeness in telling him to "mind his own business," gave me a position pumping two of his wells, which were located upon the bank of the river, just above the old swimming hole.

My salary, I remember, was to be twenty dollars per month, which to me seemed wild extravagance upon his part; for willingly, in my eagerness, would I have worked for half that sum.

Reluctantly my mother consented, reasoning that the dangers were too great for one so young; but times were hard, and business so dull that in the face of the inadequacy of the six dollars for pension, she consented to let me go.

How proud I was! I wore my trousers inside my boots, and with the blue over-all jacket my mother made for me, I felt I was quite a man. Evenings

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

when I came home I talked to her, using the gestures I was imitating from the men.

I had a feeling that she regarded me as a big, strong son, fully capable of caring for her to the utmost. Of course, such a feeling could only emanate from an egotistical tendency, but in me it prematurely developed the man, and so unconsciously that my friends overlooked it, and called me an ambitious boy.

Thus a few years passed. As the first rays of morning cast their light beyond the gloom, before merging into day, so too did my fondest hopes penetrate the darkness of poverty, and hallow my future with the twilight of anticipation.

Ere I was aware, the morning of my life had gone, and the sun of early manhood was radiant above me.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE

M R. SMEDLEY, after leaving Nina with her profusion of Christmas gifts, did not return from his office till nearly one o'clock. The few friends who had been invited to take Christmas dinner with him had arrived and were being well entertained by Nina, whose musical talents, both vocal and instrumental, had not been neglected.

She was playing a selection from Liszt, when some one announced her father's coming. "Oh! papa," she exclaimed, jumping up, and running to meet him; "we were afraid you had forgotten it was time for dinner; come folks, the toastmaster is here now, let's hie to the dining room."

"That is the first sensible thing you have said today," Grace Weatherbee ventured, "for I am as hungry as a bear."

"Yes, and you look grizzly, too," said George, her brother, who had been arguing with Mr. Graham concerning the future value of oil certificates.

"Here," said Grace, catching him by the coat, "never mind your oil business, give Nina your arm and lead the way to the table." Just a tremor of displeasure passed over Nina's face, the interpretation of which, to the close observer, would not have

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

been difficult; but she accepted his arm, and led the way.

No sooner had they entered the large dining room than Grace broke into laughter. Pointing to the sprig of mistletoe under which they had just passed, she clapped her hands merrily and exclaimed, "Kiss her, George, kiss her; this is the best chance you'll ever have to kiss the prettiest girl in town."

Nina pretended not to hear; however, she gave her companion a look which, had he any intention of acting upon the suggestion of his sister, warned him of the propriety of also pretending not to hear.

It was Grace's secret hope that George would neglect no opportunity to win Nina's affection, and this little affair rather chilled it; for she saw that her brother was distasteful to Nina, and notwithstanding her love for her chum, it cut her to the core.

"Why *don't* you kiss her?" she repeated as they formed around the table.

"I appeal to you for protection," Nina said to Mr. Weatherbee, who stood at the other side.

"And well you may," he returned. "I don't think much of a son who has to be coached in such matters; had he been a gallant fellow, he would never have passed from beneath that mistletoe until he had executed all the privileges which are granted under its branches." This little diversion provoked a general laugh.

Old Mr. Graham, who, a few years before, and until his voice failed him, was considered the lion of

## THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE

the exchange, as he took his seat broke into a series of "ha! ha's!" which were directed at young George.

"You young fellows are not like we used to be when we were boys," he said, "but I guess customs do change."

"How did you do, Mr. Graham?" asked Grace; "history must repeat itself, you know."

"Not that kind of history, my dear," he replied; "all things are fair in love and war, so they say; but I would say, except that you must never repeat any of the tactics of love. I've been in 'em both and know."

"Come, come, Graham," called Mr. Smedley from the end of the table, where he was laboring vigorously with a carving knife, "what do you know about love? Tell us one of your old-time Oil Creek stories; or better still, let us have one of your poems—something to cheer us till I have dissected this bird of antiquity."

"Poems!" Grace exclaimed, "Why, Mr. Graham, do you write poetry? Oh, Nina, what a clever fellow he must have been! Think of it—the 'lion' of the exchange, a poet! how lovely!"

"By jolly!" Mr. Weatherbee broke in; "I do remember, Graham, you have been with the muse of oildom, sure enough; the night we organized the 'Swordsmen's Club' at Pit Hole, you did yourself proud; your little poem that night was good—but not the kind women like," he added, addressing the girls.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Why?" inquired Nina.

"Because," he replied, "there was nothing about beautiful snow or spring in it. Oh, yes, girls," he added, "Mr. Graham was very apt during the days of his youth—I mean as a poet."

Mr. Graham dropped his head upon his breast, and shaking it negatively, laughed as though to himself. "Look here, girls," he said, raising his head, "don't ever waste any time upon a fellow who is given to writing poetry. They're not bad to have around, but as a rule they are too spasmodic to make good husbands; hence my reasons for clinging to a life of celibacy; and I will limit the statement to that class of fellows who write poetry to the girls they imagine they're in love with.

"Courage, firmness, character, and above all, manliness, are the traits a woman most admires. Had I a son," he continued, looking at George, "who would do it, I would thrash it out of him."

"Your argument is disjointed," George retorted quickly, with a laugh.

"How so?"

"Well, you give it as a reason for your life of 'single blessedness,' and in the same breath talk about thrashing it out of a son—if you had one."

"He is talking from an old bachelor's point of view, now," interrupted Mr. Smedley. "I believe every man during his younger days gets the 'spell'—that is, when he is really in love. He doesn't necessarily have to write poetry, but

## THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE

really I believe the true lover should, at least, feel poetical."

Mr. Graham, although quite tall, was slight and bent a little from age, and although nearing his seventieth year, was disinclined to be considered old. His features were long and angular, and while his mouth was kind and ever ready for laughter or song, its straight lines showed firmness and strong convictions of right.

He understood human nature well, reading character in faces, as one might an open book. His demeanor was careless and indifferent, which to common minds and plain thinkers acted as a barrier in preventing them from coming in contact with his true nature.

In the "Bull Ring" of the exchange he had made a nice fortune, but when the inevitable atrophy of age had weakened his vocal cords and he was unable to pitch his voice above the din of the maddened crowd of brokers, he withdrew to a life of privacy.

He cultivated few friendships, yet all who knew liked and respected him. He regarded Mr. Smedley as his best friend, and knew that the Smedley latch string for him was always on the outside.

"I tell you, Smedley," he resumed presently, "I think you are a little tangled up on the subject; love should, I'll admit, bring out the best that is in a man. Sentiment—that is all right, too. I remember how full of it you became after meeting the little

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

teacher way back in the good old days of Petroleum Centre."

Nina, recalling her father's mood on the previous evening, raised her eyes and looked a warning at the speaker. Grace, too, seemed to understand, and immediately revived the subject of poetry.

"We haven't heard your poem yet, Mr. Graham. Mr. Toast Master, will you please call for the poem?"

"Oh, wait till we have finished our dinner," said Mr. Smedley, shaking his fork at her, "then—on conditions—I may."

As dinner was about over Mr. Smedley rose and called upon Mr. Graham for an "after dinner" poem.

With great dignity, Mr. Graham requested that first honors be given to Mrs. Weatherbee. "I said I would recite on conditions, and the conditions are, that Mrs. Weatherbee speak first. I have observed she rarely talks, but when she does she always says something."

"Thank you, Mr. Graham," replied the lady, "you are very kind, indeed, but as it is unexpected, and I am entirely unprepared, I must yield the floor to you."

"Go on with your poem, Graham," Mr. Weatherbee broke in. "What did my wife ever do to you?"

"The poem! the poem!" all cried in chorus.

Upon this Mr. Graham bowed courteously to the host, and addressing him, began:

"Ladies and Gentlemen:

"The only thing striking about this 'after dinner'

## THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE

poem, so-called, is its lack of poetry, and the fact that you are all personally acquainted with the author. Never before has it been given the distinction of an ‘after dinner’ poem, and I sincerely trust that this is the last time I will ever be called upon to recite it.”

“Go on, Mr. Graham,” George said, “customs change, you know.”

“Please do,” Grace added.

“Let him alone, and he will,” Nina put in. “Order!” she cried. He looked at her with a kindly smile and continued:\*

“Men are loyal, women royal,  
Life’s best color shows,  
Skies are bluest, faith is truest,  
Cranks are fewest, styles the newest,  
Where the oil-well flows.

“Time flies quickest, talk is slickest,  
Each the other knows;  
Sun is brightest, cares are lightest,  
Woes are slightest, corsets tightest,  
Where the oil-well flows.

“Hope’s contented, air most scented,  
Girls wear nicest hose,  
Mud is meanest, grass *not* greenest,  
Dust is cleanest, sport is keenest,  
Where the oil-well flows.

“Gain is surest, beer is purest,  
Radiant promise glows,  
Wives are dearest, home is nearest,  
Fads are queerest, streams *not* clearest,  
Where the oil-well flows.

\*The above poem appeared in “Sketches of Crude Oil,” by John McLaurin; the name of the author is not mentioned.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

“Love is tender, waists are slender,  
Word once plighted goes,  
Babes are sweetest, ankles neatest,  
Nags are fleetest, joys completest,  
Where the oil-well flows.

“Holes are deepest, hills are steepest,  
Trust the highest grows,  
Maids are fairest, boys are squarest,  
Fools are rarest, bald heads barest,  
Where the oil-well flows.”

He resumed his seat amid a burst of applause.

“No wonder they called you ‘The Lion of the Exchange,’ Mr. Graham,” said Nina, “and I want you to write me a copy of that poem; it is certainly fine.”

“I haven’t any money with me, Miss Nina,” he replied, “but I credit you with the compliment.”

“How modest these great poets are,” Grace added.

“And what jolliers you girls are,” said George. “Look out for a jollier, Mr. Graham, or you’ll find yourself like Samson did, with a hair cut that will do you up.”

At this juncture a ring was heard at the hall-bell, and the maid answering it returned to the dining-room holding a telegram in her hand.

Taking the yellow envelope Mr. Smedley glanced at it and passed it down to George. “It is for you,” he said. “Some one has probably sent you their greeting by wire.”

Taking it nervously, George opened and read, at the same time turning his chair so that his sister, who sat beside him, might not see the contents.

## THE LION OF THE EXCHANGE

A pallor came over his face, which was noticeable only for a moment.

"Whom is it from?" his father asked, observing his son's sudden uneasiness.

"Oh, never mind, 'tis a little affair of my own. I am sorry, friends, but business calls me away. Miss Nina, may I trouble you for my hat and coat?"

A little affair of his own—that was something new. Mr. Weatherbee pushed his chair back from the table. "Young man," he said, his voice trembling with anger, "there's no affair of yours but what is mine; where are you going, and from whom is that message?"

"You talk, father, as though I were a boy; it is nothing of interest to any one but myself."

It was the first time George had ever spoken abruptly or irreverently to his father. Mr. Weatherbee sprang to his feet, and stood facing his son, his face livid with rage. "George Weatherbee, I command you to give me that message! As your father, I command you—do you hear?"

George, still having the telegram in his hand, now crumpled it to a wad, and thrust it into his pocket. "No," he replied with emphasis, "it is none of your business and——"

"None of my business! very well, sir, you can either explain this sudden news, which I know has filled you with fear, else, damn you, I renounce you."

"George! George!" exclaimed his mother, coming between them, "are you not ashamed to infuriate

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

your father in this unnecessary way? If you have to go why go, but don't, I beg of you, displease us, and destroy the pleasure of the company by such obstinacy."

It was the only time Weatherbee had lost control of himself, and it stung him sorely. He quickly composed himself, however, and said no more. Without a word, George left the room. Weatherbee resumed his seat at the table and tried to smile, but the attempt was feeble.

Mr. Graham, to prevent the awkward and embarrassing silence he felt sure would follow, began a few lines in the same strain as his poem.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ONLY A DRILLER

THERE seems, in the "make up" of us all, a weakness about enduring trifles when they come from one of our own blood. It is where diamond cuts diamond. Weatherbee had the reputation of keeping sweet under the strongest personal fire, but when it came from his own son, it was like match to powder.

Notwithstanding his effort to smile and appear calm, he looked ill-humored and out of sorts, and with the exception of Mr. Graham, who kept up a continual outpour of wit, every one seemed stunned into reticence.

Grace, unable to control herself longer, burst into a fit of hysterical sobbing, which, of course, made matters worse.

"Girls cry loudest," Mr. Graham began in the same rhythm, but Grace checked herself, and after drying her eyes quickly, said, "No, they don't. Mercy! there's no limit to that song of yours, but I just don't care, papa, it was mean of you! Why shouldn't George have his own affairs. He certainly is no boy."

"Say no more, dear," her father returned, "it is all right, George, and I fully understand; it is not nearly so bad as you think—and your poem, Graham,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

is good. Ah! how it brings back those good old days of Pit Hole, where money and good fellowship were on all sides—and the prince of good fellows was Al Smiley. He certainly was a Swordsman true."

"Yes, indeed; Smiley is now at Foxburg," Mr. Graham replied, "and buys all the oil in the Clarion field for the Standard. By the way, Weatherbee, how did you ever make out with the Goulds? The last time I saw them was at Franklin, looking up evidence to prove that you sold them a gold brick!"

"Oh, yes, I remember those Goulds, father and son," said Mr. Smedley; "it was after I had drilled my first well; they did a great deal of talking, but guess they were disappointed beyond reconciliation."

"They tried to scare me, that was all," Mr. Weatherbee returned; "yes, I remember I sold all my Clarion County property to them.

"Well, Smedley," he continued, "this certainly has been a most enjoyable dinner; we are indebted to you." Then turning to his wife, who had been silent since the little unpleasantness, he said, "Mamma, I guess it is time we were going, don't you think so?"

"I guess it is," she replied meekly. "We are expecting friends this evening from Titusville, so we'd better be going. Grace, will you 'phone for the sleigh?"

"Oh, let me," said Nina, jumping up and running out with her friend to the 'phone in the hall.

"Don't think hard of me, folks, for losing my temper with George. The fact is, he has been making

## ONLY A DRILLER

some bad investments lately, buying oil on margin, and I don't know whether he's been playing the ups, or the downs. He won't ask advice, but goes headlong. I am sure his telegram pertained to some loss he has sustained. If he would but listen to me, I am sure I could guide him aright; he won't, though, and it provokes me."

"I think you're wrong," said Mr. Graham, speaking seriously. "I never reared any boys, nor girls for that matter, but I know enough about men, young and old, to know they are not willing to have their errors in judgment criticised; besides, Weatherbee, you can never drive George—he has too much of his daddy in him."

After the Weatherbees had taken their departure, Mr. Smedley took his friend to the library, where they talked and smoked till late in the evening. Their conversation naturally drifted to the Weatherbees, and particularly to George, who had dealt such a blow to his proud parent.

"They are both a study in human character," Mr. Graham remarked; "I can't say that I like either of them."

"Well," Mr. Smedley returned, "I have known them a long time, and like them, too, quite well. Of course, I know he is an exceedingly shrewd business man, but that he is clean, honest and square I have never doubted, for I think he is all right."

"Don't think too hard, Smedley, you may hurt yourself; as for the son, ah, I positively dislike him.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Nothing in him but the ‘Ego,’ and believe me, the fellow has no morals.”

“Oh, pshaw! Graham, don’t be so hard on him—he’s still a boy.”

“Smedley, I have now lived on this sphere nearly seventy years, and have been a close observer, and that you can always see the man in the boy is an unerring law of Nature.”

Poor Nina! When her friend had gone, and quiet reigned throughout the house, with the exception of the indistinct voices of her father and Mr. Graham, she stole to her room, and opening a little drawer of the dressing table, took out the brief letter sent that morning by Mr. Payne.

Seating herself on the bed, she read it over and over many times. “Why do I like him?” she asked herself repeatedly. Then she remembered how manly, how jolly, and at the same time, how earnest he was. Not a word did he speak while with the crowd that was not permeated with noble thought. How proudly he spoke of his mother as his best girl!

“Papa dislikes him, and for no other reason than my expressing a liking for him. Dear father, too! Deary me, this is a funny old world. People say, ‘I love you,’ and at the same time make you miserable by giving you advice against the things you crave most—folly, folly, folly!

“Children are nagged and whipped because they don’t act, think and do as their parents believe, and the same difference continues till—goodness! no won-

## ONLY A DRILLER

der girls run away; I won't though, no, no, I will never deceive my dear papa. I will go to him, show him the note, and ask his permission. If he should die, and a remorseful conscience told me I had displeased him, and too late to ask forgiveness—oh, it would be so bitter!"

Several hours had elapsed, and rising, she went down stairs. Pausing in the hall, she listened to catch the sound of voices from the library—all was still. "He has gone, too," she was thinking, when the door opened, and the two men came out together.

"Haven't you gone yet?" she asked, addressing Mr. Graham, whose continued gaping and arm-stretching told he had fallen asleep in his chair.

"Don't look that way," he answered, yawning; "too much turkey and mince pie. Guess I will walk to my hotel, and shake off this drowsy, lazy feeling."

Nina's eyes twinkled as she said,

"Men get sleepy when they 'eaty'  
Too much Christmas pie."

"Stop! you little rascal; how *dare* you try to burlesque my famous 'after dinner' poem?" he said, chasing her into the library.

Her sweet, clear voice rang out in hearty laughter. Returning, she said, "Don't forget to write me a copy, and I won't." Jumping upon the hall seat, she took his big overcoat, holding it that he might put it on with ease.

"Thank you," he said, turning and extending his

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

hands to her. Nina took them, and jumped nimbly to the floor.

"By cracky!" he said, still holding them, "the fellow that gets these little mits will have to be a good one. That laugh of yours, Nina, is as full of sunshine as a clear day in June. May it never be clouded."

"Thank you, Mr. Graham. I am sure you are thoughtful, but no life can escape the clouds. If you didn't pretend to be so much younger than you really are, I would kiss you—I love old men."

Mr. Smedley laughed, "Why, Nina!"

"Never you mind," said Graham, addressing his friend, "I now see the folly of my vanity, Nina; I am a very *old* man."

"I have always thought so," she agreed, withdrawing her hands from his grasp, and putting them upon his shoulders, "and this is the proof of my opinion." Pulling his head down, she kissed him on the cheek.

"It's a good thing Ponce De Leon didn't live in this day, or he could certainly have found his spring of perpetual youth in you." He walked toward the door as he spoke, and went out, leaving the father and daughter to themselves.

"Well, girlie," said Mr. Smedley, putting an arm fondly around his daughter and leading her back to the library, "have you enjoyed your Christmas?"

"Very much, indeed, only it made me so nervous the way Mr. Weatherbee talked to George. I didn't

## ONLY A DRILLER

know he had such a temper. I wonder what it all meant, anyway?"

"I never saw him flare up so before," Mr. Smedley returned, "but I have noticed he has not been quite himself of late. It was of no consequence, I am sure, but George is willful, probably too much so, and while it worries his father, I believe he will round up all right. I have to laugh at Graham—he thinks not, but being old makes him a bit of a pessimist."

Nina raised her finger and held it a moment before her eye, when her father referred to Mr. Graham's age. "Yes, he is old," she said, laughingly, "that's why I kissed him; the poor, lonely old fellow; but say, papa, old as he is, he certainly can read character."

"Oh, certainly, certainly, no question about it, my dear; see—how was it he read yours? Oh, yes, sunshine, spring of perpetual youth, and—"

"Now stop your teasing, daddy," she said, putting her hand to his mouth. "I have something else to talk about. I want to ask you something." She seated herself upon his knee.

"First, dear papa, if what I say displeases you, don't scold, just be kind to me, for I shall never disobey you, nor shall I ever deceive you; but please allow me to—" she paused, feeling she was about to ask more than he cared to grant her.

Handing him the letter, she continued, "I received it this morning after you had gone to the office; it is from that Mr. Payne—read it!"

Bending toward the fire, he read it carefully. Nina

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

noticed a tremor in his hand, and was half sorry she had not destroyed it. "Well, what has been your answer?" he said, settling back in his chair.

"None, dear papa, no answer until you say so."

Mr. Smedley reflected a few moments. "I am glad you have acted so wisely," he finally said, gently pushing her from his knee as he spoke. "I shall not be cross or scold you, but Nina, I see I must be firm with you. My answer is *no!* decidedly, *no!* Throw this into the fire, and never let me hear you mention this man's name again. I agree with Graham: no man can take you from here unless he is a good one, and capable of giving you a home as good, if not better, than the one you now enjoy."

"I know, father dear, you are good to me, and I know, too, that you are acting for what you believe to be my future happiness; but why do you dislike him of whom you know so little? Listen, papa! something tells me that he is the little Johnny Payne I used to play with when a little girl, and for that reason, if no other, let us invite him to come."

He raised his hand threateningly. "Stop!" he cried. "Not another word! I don't care if he is, he does not possess any wealth—*he is only a driller*, and not the kind of a man on whom I wish you to bestow your affections. He cannot come here, and you *must* not communicate with him, in any way—let this be final."

As the sound of his voice died away, a stillness that was oppressive settled about the house. Nina stood

## ONLY A DRILLER

staring into the fire, and recalled the silence of the previous night, when he had finished the story of her mother.

"Had my mother been as particular about a home," she was thinking, "father would not have been so fortunate in getting so lovable a wife. Ah! money makes fools of us all."

It was several minutes before she made reply. Her spirits were crushed by the cruel words, "Only a driller." It was with strenuous effort she suppressed the tears, for she loved this man and knew that no slighting words from her father could change her heart; but obey him she would at any cost.

"All right, papa, I'll do as you say; it was for your advice I came; you have given it, and I will take it." Taking a few steps toward the grate, she held the letter against the flame and dropped it upon the tile where it soon lay a piece of charred paper. For a few moments she stood gazing at it sadly, feeling that the light of her life, like the flame, had gone out forever.

The sweetness of her nature, however, was shown in her words. Her yielding was cheerful, and it affected her father deeply. Had she rebelled, he would have been more at ease; as it was, he felt guilty.

"God bless you, little girl," he said, clasping her in his arms. "Don't think me severe or too determined. I only ask you to bear with me until time reveals to you that I have acted wisely, and am right."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"I know," she replied, "that incidents of this nature are common in all homes, especially where there are girls of a marriageable age, and mistakes have been made on both sides; but you can rest assured that your daughter will never do anything without your sanction, though I confess to you that I can no more help loving him than I can you; but he shall never have the chance to know it until you agree to it."

She kissed him fondly and hurried to her room.

Again the man sat in front of the fire and watched the grotesque objects in the heated asbestos till he fell asleep.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A FORGED CHECK

THERE was considerable displeasure, mingled with anxiety, upon the brow of George Weatherbee when he left the Smedley home bearing the unexplained telegram.

Reaching the street, he hurried his steps toward the State Street bridge, and crossed over into the business part of the city. Few were upon the streets. The cutting December wind as it bore down the river valley from the north compelled people to seek the warmth of their homes and lodgings.

Buttoning his overcoat tightly about his neck, he walked rapidly toward the depot. The train from Buffalo and Titusville was late, so he took a seat among the loungers who had taken shelter in the waiting-room of the station.

"He will try to scare me, but I will crimp his vanity like parchment."

In this, George reckoned without his host. He had forged several checks upon his father, but when at the bank the signatures were compared and found to conflict, the matter was adjusted by Weatherbee, who saw no other course if he wished to save his son from disgrace. Upon a promise never to repeat the offense, he increased his son's allowance, hoping this

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

would make such fraudulent effort unnecessary; but there was no limit to George's desires, as he spent his money recklessly. At the gambling dens he was an easy mark, and when funds began to decrease he resorted again to forgery, only this time it was upon his friend Smedley, instead of his father.

"Wouldn't the girls be sore if they found it out?" he soliloquized; "and old Smedley would have a cataleptic fit. I hope I can fix this up in some way; if I don't, old Greggs will show me up. Oh, well, I'll play the sympathy racket for awhile, I'll get out of it some way; there is such a thing as robbing Peter to pay Paul."

Hearing the train whistle, he went outside to the platform, and paced up and down till the snow-covered coaches pulled in. Eagerly he watched the passengers alight till he caught sight of Mr. Greggs, the banker, who had sacrificed his Christmas at home on account of the son of his business friend, Weatherbee. Stepping from the train, Greggs walked directly to the young man, who stood in the background waiting for him.

"Well, I see you are here," the banker ventured good-naturedly. "Got my message all right, did you?"

"Yes, sir, and it pretty nearly raised a fuss, as the old man was determined to know its contents."

Mr. Greggs half wished Weatherbee had succeeded.

"We were invited to dinner at Smedley's to-day," George continued, "and were at the table when it came; of course it rattled me a little at first, but

## A FORGED CHECK

knowing you would stand by me like a man, as you always have done, I just braced up and gave him to understand it was none of his affair."

Mr. Greggs bit his lip in disgust. "What more could one expect from such a youth?" he was thinking. "These pampered boys don't, as a rule, amount to much; if I had a boy, I would compel him to work for every cent he got; money easily obtained is a curse."

The two men hurried away and entered the rear door of one of the prominent banks. Inside, Mr. Greggs lighted the gas in the grate, and bade George draw his chair close. "Now, Mr. Weatherbee," he began, taking a paper from his pocket, "here is the check, and it is a very poor imitation of Mr. Smedley's signature; the moment I saw it I knew it was some more of your work; now, young man, I mean to show you no mercy; if some one does not take steps to curb your wild career, the future, I'm afraid, will terminate disastrously for you."

"I was sure I could make enough money to redeem this, but I failed in my plans; surely, Mr. Greggs, you will hold it till I do?"

"How long will that be?" he asked.

"A couple of weeks, say."

"Impossible, sir! the first of the year will soon be here and Mr. Smedley will want a settlement; a few days is all you must expect."

George Weatherbee was no fool, for all he was dishonest, and he knew as he looked into the clear black

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

eyes of Mr. Greggs, that he was trying to play with the wrong man.

"I'll do my best," he said, "and——"

"That's right," Mr. Greggs interrupted, "do your best, and take my advice; let this be a lesson to you, for a thief cannot prosper." Then, returning the check to his pocket, he rose, turned out the fire, and bade his visitor good-by.

That young Weatherbee was living a pretty fast life, was being commented on by many of his associates. The diplomacy and strategy characteristic of his father, and which had played so important a part in amassing his wealth, was a part of his unconscious inheritance, and with it he was quite as successful, not alone in duping friends, but in covering up his tracks so completely that even the shrewd father reasoned partly in his son's behalf, and compelled the world to believe his boy was one of whom to be proud; and while he did not mean to be extravagant in indulging him, yet he had been liberal enough to destroy his sense and appreciation of money value; this gone, there could be no limit to the spendthrift's desires.

Another thing: being Weatherbee's son, business men were willing to extend a generous credit to him, which only added fuel to the fire of his dissipation; and as time passed and his allowance grew more and more inadequate to his needs, other methods were resorted to, and finally that of forging his father's name to checks; and when detected and accused, the

## A FORGED CHECK

excuse to his parent was what might be expected, "If you would give me money enough to live as *other* boys do, I wouldn't have done it."

Then came the increase in his allowance, but alas! the duck, regardless of the protests of its hen mother, gets into the water at every presentable opportunity. Seeing a check upon his father's desk, he traced the signature upon tissue paper, and the next time when funds were deficient, he forged the name of his friend Smedley; but the attempt was bungled, and for the first time he stood upon the brink of disgrace.

"How was he to obtain the money for Mr. Greggs?" He was conscious of the fact that his habits were too well established to admit of saving it from his allowance. Returning home, he found the family at tea with the friends they had expected. Late in the evening Grace found him in the "den" stretched out on the seat-box, smoking a cigarette. She told him all that had transpired at Smedley's after he had gone, and that she had defended him.

"Is father angry yet?" he asked.

"I think not," she replied; then telling him the excuse their father had given regarding bad speculations in the exchange, she coaxingly tried to share his confidence regarding the message, and he saw in this a good opportunity to elude her.

"Father was right, Grace," he said, "I have made some terrible blunders in stocks lately, especially on gas and oil margins; he doesn't really know, either,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

how deeply I am involved, but when I get out this time, I will stay out."

"Poor fellow," she said, stroking the hair back from his forehead: "you must be careful—can't I help you?"

"At last," he thought, "she is nibbling.

"You are the best of little sisters, Grace, yes, you could help me, but I hate to impose on your goodness."

"Tell me how," she whispered.

"If you *will* help me, Grace, I will promise to quit speculating, and devote my time to helping father, and further, I will do what you have so many times requested of me."

"Oh, will you, George? If you will only promise me you will stay at home at night, I will do all that is in my power for you."

Putting his arm over her shoulder, he promised all that he knew she wished him to do.

"You have been saving your income, Grace, and have, I know, considerable money in your name; loan me two hundred dollars, and I will turn over a new leaf—see if I don't."

"Oh, George, you cannot imagine how happy this makes me feel; the money shall be in your hands to-morrow morning."

Hearing her father call, she left him to answer the summons, and as her form vanished through the door, he fell back with a chuckle to his former position, and muttered, "She was dead easy; I'll make old Greggs look twice to-morrow."

## A FORGED CHECK

The next afternoon when George Weatherbee entered the bank, it was with the air of a man who fears neither God, man, nor the devil. Mr. Greggs saw him when he came in, and asked him back into his private room.

"Did you come to see me?" he asked.

"Come to get that check," George returned, with a significant grin.

"I am very glad, Mr. Weatherbee," Greggs said taking it from a wallet, and holding it toward him.

George placed the money in the banker's hand, who in turn handed him the check. Folding it, and tearing it to fragments, George tossed the pieces into a waste basket, and was about to withdraw from the room, when the banker detained him.

"I wish a word with you before you go; sit down, please," and he drew two chairs together.

"Young man," he began, laying a hand gently on George's arm, "I hope this lesson will be an impressive one, and that you will take its teachings seriously to heart."

"You have many things to be thankful for, and why you should be guilty of such disreputable work, I am unable to understand; and for the sake of the little sister, who, I feel sure, drew this money," indicating the money in his hand, "from the bank this morning—be honest!" A meaningless smile, producing a slight curling of the upper lip, was the youth's answer. Not the slightest expression of ap-

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

preciation was visible on his face. He did not even thank the man who had so unselfishly shielded him from open shame and disgrace.

"No appreciation in the fellow," Mr. Greggs thought, as he watched George leave the building; "but if he ever does it again, there will be no secret adjusting of matters. I will show him no mercy, but publicly expose him."

"Well, that's off my mind, anyway," George Weatherbee thought, as he hurried away from the bank. There was but one way he saw remaining now, which would still enable him to indulge and gratify his extravagant tastes, and that was to marry Nina Smedley—but—could he?

This he feared, for he knew she disliked him—the look she momentarily gave him when he offered his arm was silent but sufficient evidence that she did; but he knew she loved his sister, and he knew, too, that Grace would help him. Taking the first South-side car, he went home.

Grace was in the library when he entered. "Hello, brother," she said, glancing up and smiling; "aren't you home unusually early?"

"Didn't I promise to turn over a new leaf?" he asked, taking a seat near her.

"George, this is lovely—tell me, did you fix matters up all right?"

"Everything is settled; I am not afraid now of any broker, and more, when you hear of this child buying margins again, let me know."

## A FORGED CHECK

"How happy mother will be now, George; you cannot imagine how she worries about you nights when you are out. I have known her to go to your room many times, and then retire weeping about you."

"How foolish!" he said, with a reckless laugh.  
"Has Nina been over to-day?"

"No, why?"

"Oh, I want to see her, she is a dandy girl."

"Nina *is* an exception. I never saw her equal."

"In what way, George?"

"In every and any way you please to take her. But she don't like me—wonder why?"

"I believe she does, George, although I think she disapproves of your extravagant ideas."

"Well, I've turned over a new leaf, you know."

"Yes, and I am going to tell her how happy you are going to make mother and me. She will rejoice with us, I know."

Shifting his chair closer to her side, he looked inquiringly into her face.

"Grace, I love Nina desperately and can never be happy until she is my wife. I feel she dislikes me, and have, for this reason, deferred my suit; but you can help me; won't you, Grace, can't you?" he added eagerly.

"Why, George, how foolish and silly of you! do you suppose Nina is the kind of a girl to tolerate love made indirectly to her? You must tell her yourself. I told her you were jealous of that Payne fellow, and what do you suppose she said? 'George jealous!'

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

mercy, I hope he is not of the Miles Standish sort, afraid to speak for himself.'"

"Did she?"

"She certainly did, and let me remind you that Miles Standish laid great stress on the axiom, 'If you would have a thing well done, you must do it yourself, you must not leave it to others.' But, George, I will help you all I can, and if you win her, you will have the dearest, sweetest, and best girl in the world."

"That sounds good, Grace, and is true to a certain extent, but nevertheless, I feel I need your assistance, for you know what will please her best; so if you tell me the things to do, and those not to do, I will follow your instructions to the letter."

Nina Smedley was not the kind of girl to which George Weatherbee was accustomed. There was a class, to be sure, with whom he felt at ease, but the atmosphere around this girl was too pure for him to understand, and knowing it, he felt the necessity of his sister aiding him.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### BE MY WIFE

THE holiday season, with the birth of a new year, had come and gone. It was the beginning of 1882, that eventful year in Oil-dum, and never to be forgotten by the producers of crude oil.

Many of Nina's friends who had earnestly wished her a "Happy New Year" never suspected, not even her father, how sad and lonely the inward self of their friend really was, and how utterly impossible it would be for her to be *happy* after the final decision of her father relative to Mr. Payne.

As time passed, and the inevitable longing for the man she loved intensified, periods of melancholy would assert themselves, until her friends became alarmed.

In the meantime, anxious that her brother would not fail in winning the affections of her friend, Grace planned a little reception in honor of an out-of-town friend. No social function of hers was ever considered complete without the presence of her friend Nina. This time, however, she carried her plans a little farther, and to the end that George and Nina would be together most of the evening.

Nina received the invitation during one of her

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

morose moods, and to shake the spell, she entered into the spirit of the occasion, putting forth every effort to insure its success.

"There is one thing you must keep in mind," said Grace, by way of giving her brother his first instructions. "Remember that we cannot help but love those who appreciate us; so when the opportunity presents itself do not fail to modestly praise Nina's accomplishments. Like the rest of us, she has a 'hobby,' and don't forget to pet it; with her, it is literature, and while you possess but little knowledge of it, if chance permits tell her how much you enjoy the writings of Shakespeare and wonder why such marvelous intellect as he possessed has never been duplicated. These are little things, George, but they will please and help to win her favor."

The evening of the reception George called at an early hour for Nina. He was dressed nicely and looked well. Physically, he was a model—medium height, straight, and square shouldered. His step was light and brisk, betraying his restless nature, but all considered, he was graceful and attractive. It was only the details of his composition that betrayed the secrets of his character.

Nina was surprised when he told her he had called expressly to escort her to the party. "The air is quite raw this evening, so I brought the carriage; in fact, Grace insisted upon it."

"Poor Grace," Nina replied; "she must think I am

## B E M Y W I F E

very frail, but I appreciate her thoughtfulness; it was lovely in her to be so considerate."

Throughout the evening he was very attentive, neglecting no opportunity whereby he could in any way contribute to her comfort or enjoyment, and was so polite and courteous that Nina could not help but wonder what had become of his previously careless and indifferent ways.

If she sang, he praised her modestly, and when she gave expression to an idea, original or otherwise, of value or not, he agreed and expatiated upon it so earnestly that Nina was placed at her wit's end to know if she had not hitherto judged him wrongly.

As the evening advanced, and all seemed in good spirits, Mr. Weatherbee and his wife joined the young folks at cards. Grace arranged the players into groups of four, placing Nina and her brother opposite that they might be partners. "It will make their interest mutual for once," she thought, "and great things often grow from trifles."

After playing several games Mr. and Mrs. Weatherbee indulged in a series of jokes and funny stories, then retired, leaving the young folks to themselves.

At last the affair came to an end. Grace helped Nina into her wraps, and telling George to see her safely home walked to the door with them.

"How do you like her?" she asked her guest.

"I think she is a queer sort of girl."

"Queer?" Grace said with surprise.

"Yes, quite, indeed."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Why, I adore her."

"Oh, she *is* lovely, no doubt, but she looks and acts so glum."

"She met a fellow here from Bradford, just before the holidays," Grace said, confidentially, "and since then I have noticed a great change in her. George, too, is desperately in love with her; I do hope he can win her."

"Does the Bradford fellow love her, though?" her guest questioned.

"I think not; he has never been here since, and besides, I know he has never written her, for she confides everything in me."

"True love never confides, Grace; you will find that that barrier lies between that girl and the man she loves. When I see a girl move so calmly and sweetly, as if trying to escape coming in contact with little difficulties, I always mark it as coming from one who is inwardly burdened with sorrow."

To this Grace made no reply, beyond the purring sound indicative of agreeing. Bidding her friend good-night, she sat down by the fire to wait the return of her brother.

"I hope, Nina, you have spent a pleasant evening with us," George said, when the two were seated in the carriage. "Your presence always makes things go right."

"Thank you, George, you are kind to say it."

"Sister Grace says you always do the right thing at the right time."

## B E M Y W I F E

"I always enjoy myself when with her, she understands me so well."

"Was this the secret of the love she had for his sister?" The thought flashed through his mind, recalling Grace's dictum of appreciation calling out the love of others.

"You love her, Miss Smedley, don't you?"

"Call me Nina, please, Miss sounds too formal."

"Well, Nina, then, don't you?"

"Yes, very much, she is as dear to me as a sister."

"I am glad to hear you say it; indeed, Nina, I want you to be—and, and," he continued awkwardly, "it has been the hope of my life, that some day you will be more of a sister to her than you are now, for Nina, I, I—" he paused, as if afraid to proceed any further.

Nina felt a chill creep through her veins. "My God!" she thought, "is he going to ask me to marry him?" Something tightened about her throat, and she felt the throbbing of her heart.

She was about to ask him "What?" but caught herself, knowing that such a question would only encourage him to proceed. As the carriage turned a corner of the street the wheel struck the curb, and she was thrown by the lurch almost into his arms.

Catching up her gloved hand and holding it in both of his, he continued, "Nina, I love you, have loved you a long, long time, but you always restrained me. I have been afraid of you—afraid you would never care for me, and with that belief I have been careless

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

and wild, but I can endure it no longer, I must tell you. For the sake of the love you bear to Grace, be my wife."

"Stop!" she exclaimed, withdrawing her hand from his clasp. "It is impossible, I do not want to marry, I want to be free; and if you love me, George Weatherbee, prove it by never speaking this way again. With all my heart I thank you for thinking so well of me, but to be your wife is impossible."

"Very well," he returned, his face burning with defeated selfishness, "I will say no more to-night, but promise for the future, I cannot; for love such as I feel for you cannot be silenced. Think it over—no doubt I have been abrupt and rash, but weigh it well in the balance of your judgment, and then if you still feel the same, I will meet the inevitable like a man."

Could he have seen her face, no doubt his heart, hard as it was, would have softened at the wretchedness his words had produced. In silence they walked from the carriage to the steps of her home, and bidding her "Good-night," he told the driver to hurry home out of the cold.

## CHAPTER XIX

### AN AWFUL FIRE

**W**HEN the Bingham and Minard Run tracts had been opened in McKean County and the Bradford boom was on, the scene was commonly spoken of as the "Producers' Paradise."

We, with many others, left our little belongings in Clarion County, and moved to the new metropolis, Bradford, a name which became synonymous with big wells and plenty of money.

By chance I fell in with the genial "Farmer Dean," who at the time was general manager for the McCalmont Oil Company, and as soon as I told him of my desire to find work he gave me a position as gauger upon one of his leases, known as the "Tack Farm," and situated some seven or eight miles from the city.

This position I held for several months, resigning it to become a tool-dresser, believing the change would afford better opportunities for advancement in the business.

The benevolent spirit so characteristic of the farmer prompted him to furnish me money to build a small house upon the lease. In it mother and I were very happy, and once more we lived among the oil wells in the woods.

About one mile distant, upon a cleared portion of

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

the ridge, an oil town sprang into existence; and the scenes of wild excitement through which we had passed, especially at Antwerp, were once more being enacted upon the stage of Bradford's best days. Such wells were never seen before nor since, nor do we, the producers of to-day, ever expect to see such wells again.

Being of a large frame, muscular and active, tool dressing was play to me. The heavy club bits, which had made the rimmer an unnecessary tool around drilling wells, I handled as a child would a toy. The drillers marveled at my strength and talked of it so much around their boarding-houses, that my popularity as a strong man was gratifying, to say the least.

I determined to master the art of drilling and become a contractor myself. Accordingly I studied diligently the language of "the rope," a queer tongue to be sure, but plain and simple when once understood. Not through the ear does it speak, but through the fingers of trained hands.

How many times have I been spared the anxiety of a long and lonely night, by the rope lore which every stroke of the beam set free, and how many times it whispered words of joy into my clenched hand, saying; "Oil, and lots of oil at last! the hole is rapidly filling! put out your fires and make ready for the impetuous flow of a gusher." All this coming in a single impulse and never by the appreciative hand ignored.

Think of the fascination. With the exception of

## A N AWFUL FIRE

your tool-dresser, who spends most of his time watching and firing the boiler, you are alone. Your rig is situated miles from the nearest dwelling and surrounded by countless acres of solitary forests. You sit upon the driller's bench, and with hand upon either clamp or rope listen to strange and ever changing tales coming from thousands of feet below, where the ponderous stem is driving the bit and crushing its way through the strata of old rock-ribbed mother-earth.

"Make me a little tighter," it says, "and the tools will cut faster. Let out the screw quickly, we are in a bed of shale. Make me very tight so the bit can only hit every other stroke, else we will be stuck in a mighty bowlder of granite," and last, but not least, "Make ready for the fate of this well, for we are bouncing on the top of the hard shell which caps the oil-bearing sand."

Such is the "language of the rope," and to those of us who have studied it faithfully is due the credit of exalting drilling from a commonplace business to the dignity of a science.

Rapidly the McKean field was perforated, not a dry hole was struck. Regardless of sixty-seven and a half-degree lines, and streaks, conditions which seemed to govern developments "below," the eager producer earnestly plied the drill, north, south, east and west; but go where he would, drill where he might, a good well always rewarded his efforts. When, at last, dry wells were encountered, he knew from

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

experience that he had gone beyond the margin of that wonderful reservoir of oil. So soon as a well was "drilled in," the gas pressure, which was confined to the upper pores of the sand, was utilized to flow the oil to the top and into the tanks.

This was made possible by the ingenious brain of S. R. Dresser, who invented a device called the "packer." Frequently the fury of a big well would blow out packer and tubing, and blow so high into the air, that the woods for a radius of hundreds of feet would become completely saturated with oil.

Thousands of barrels escaped by the overflowing of tanks, and ran in streams down the hill-sides till the mountain brooks below, which for ages had been the undisturbed home of the speckled trout, had their clean mossy beds filled to the brim with waste oil.

Down, down went the oil market. "There's too much oil," came the cry; but the excitement was rife, and it still paid to drill big wells with oil at forty-nine cents per barrel.

For the first time in its history the capacity of the Standard Oil Company was taxed. Try as they did, they found themselves unable to take care of the oil. Their gaugers and district foremen were confronted upon all sides with bribes from the producers, whose tanks were gorged, and no doubt a note or two past due in the bank.

"If you run my tank in the morning—say at six-thirty—you might find something on the 'stop.'"

## AN AWFUL FIRE

This was the way it was usually expressed, and having no instructions beyond "run all we have room for," the chances were that something was doing at the specified tank and at the specified time. And what was found on the "stop"? The gifts (?) were manifold, but gold watches, diamond rings and hundred dollar bills seemed to be the articles of choice.

After I had served six months as tool-dresser, and believing my knowledge of drilling was sufficient to assume that rôle myself, I was given charge of the tools on that famous and faithful well, "Tack Farm, No. Seven."

It was early spring, and the woods were fragrant with the scent of the trailing arbutus, which grew in profusion throughout the county. Filled with the pride which comes with increased responsibility, I went to the newly finished rig and gave my instructions regarding "rigging up." I inspected the structure as a captain might his ship; everything was solid. I remember the details. The main-sill was of heavy oak, and the walking-beam was from one of the gigantic chestnuts common on the ridges. The balance of the timbers was of black birch, and emitted a sweet aroma which added luster to my already brightened spirits.

David Kirk, president of the company, and at the time a candidate for Congress, came out from Bradford to see us start the drill. His language to me was kind and courteous, and while I wasn't a "Green-backer," I resolved before he left the rig to vote for him.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"I have been very uneasy about this dry weather," he remarked, before leaving.

"Why?" I asked.

"The great possibility of fire," he returned. "Everything is so dry, and so much waste oil upon the ground. Every brook is full of it, and the woods are nearly soaked with it. If fire should start it would be something awful."

I had not thought of it before; being busy, the outside possibilities did not occur to me; however, I grasped the situation—a fire would be terrible.

At that juncture Mr. Dean happened in, and we told him of our fears. "You are right, Davy," he said, going to the water-barrel by the headache-post and submerging his cigar, "I will lose no time in fortifying *this* lease."

By dark that evening Dean, on horseback, was riding around, giving orders like a general to no less than five hundred men.

The next day was ushered in by a bright spring sun. As noon approached the heat grew intense, and I was glad when the opposite crew came to relieve us. We had just finished spudding—the hardest task imposed in drilling a well.

After washing, and changing my clothes in the mouth of the belt-house, I had just picked up my square dinner pail ready to go home when we felt the sudden thud of a nitro-glycerine explosion; but as several magazines and shooter wagons had "gone up" that year, the sudden jar did not disturb us beyond

## A N AWFUL FIRE

the usual comment, "Wonder what poor devil has gone now?"

This started a little discussion among us relative to the advisability of shooting wells with the stuff, and the great cinch Roberts had by cunningly securing a patent and soaking the producer before his well could be torpedoed.

I took the position that the infernal compound was so dangerous that I believed it best to have it in the hands of one man, who, by rapid experience, could eliminate many of the dangers and perfect a system whereby its handling could be made safe. We had been discussing the subject for several minutes, when Dean rode up to the side of the derrick on his horse.

"Shut down, boys, as quick as you can; let the tools rest on bottom; a fire has started over the hill, and is coming this way. Join me at the tool-house—we have work to do."

I went out on the walk leading to the engine-house and looked; sure enough, clouds of smoke were rising into the air. "Payne," he called, "you had better go and look after your mother; we can get along without you for awhile."

Hurrying home I found my mother outside, pacing to and fro in uneasy anticipation. Meantime the clouds of black smoke became more dense, obscuring the sun above us.

"Oh, John!" she exclaimed, catching my arm and holding it tight, "what will become of us?" As I looked into her face my mind recalled the time when

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

a little girl had clung to me in a similar manner, and under similar conditions of fear.

Surrounded by woods, with the air black above us, it was impossible to tell from which direction the fire came. "Merciful heaven!" she said, "this is like the day of judgment." I had experienced no sense of fear, but now, as the hiss of the surging billows of fire came to my ears I grew sick at heart, knowing how impossible it would be for my mother to run away from such a rapidly spreading conflagration.

"Don't be frightened," I said, trying to appear cool. "Mr. Dean has the lease well protected with more than five hundred men, who can put out the first spark that may fall."

Blacker grew the sky above us; the wind rose and sighed over the fate of the beautiful forest through which it blew. The air grew hot and stifling and it seemed impossible to plan a means of escape. Firebrands, carried on the wings of the wind, were dropping here and there, setting fire to the dry leaves and brush around our dwelling.

Suddenly one of the wells quite near us burst into flame with the report of a cannon. Thank God for my giant strength! I picked my mother up in my arms, and ran in the direction of the road leading to the developments in Wolf Run.

Through the woods I hurried, bearing my precious burden. Reaching the roadway, I encountered the panic-stricken people of the town rushing in a mass to escape the flames. Women and children were

## A N A W F U L F I R E

crying and praying piteously. Strong men, with terror written upon their faces, trudged along, carrying a child, or some valued piece of property.

Drillers and tool-dressers who had been driven from their daily sleep left their boarding-houses without taking time to dress or find their clothes, and paraded, unmindful of their grotesque appearance, along with the crowd, in their night clothes.

On, on we went, all bearing our burdens, but without uttering a word, the fiery demon hard on our trail. Horses, cows, dogs, cats and chickens helped to make up that awe-stricken procession.

Carrying my mother till my arms had given out, I put her down, and tried to assist her along, but the excitement proved too much, and she sank exhausted to the ground. "For God's sake," I cried, "can't some one help me to carry this woman? The fire will soon be upon us."

One of the half-clad drillers came to my aid, and with our hands together, we formed a chair upon which she sat, supporting herself with an arm about either of our necks. "Will we escape?" the thought passed through my mind many times. I looked back; the sight made me weak; the fire had crossed behind, and would soon sweep down upon us. "Hurry," I gasped.

With the exception of the women and children, the men let their bundles fall—life was the only thing now at stake. Down into a ravine, crazed with fear and anguish, with but one thought—the salvation

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

of our lives, we rushed, but horror of horrors! when we reached the bottom we were met with flames coming down the opposite slope.

Retreat was impossible; from the rear and right came the flames, and now in front of us; women dropped upon their knees and prayed. "Down the Run!" I screamed, and started for the road. The cry was taken up, and leaving the road, the maddened crowd turned to the left into the unbroken forest.

Over rocks and moss-covered logs, through tangled briars and bushes we forced our way. The air seemed to grow cooler, and taking courage we doubled our speed, emerging into a hemlock forest beside a mountain stream.

Pausing to rest and quench our thirst from the brook, I looked for the first time into the face of the man who had helped me save my mother. It was Jim Boyd. In silence I grasped his hand, too full to utter a word.

The broomy tops of the hemlocks told that the wind had shifted and was blowing the fire away from us. This gave us a sense of security, and the scattered crowd were soon huddled along the bank of the stream.

As evening approached, a threatening rain began to fall in great scattered drops, and with the night came the first thunder-storm of the year; and ere the darkness fell, a heavy downpour of rain set in. Women who had prayed looked upon the rain as an answer to their prayers—who would dare to gainsay it?

## AN AWFUL FIRE

Leaving my mother with the women of the crowd, I joined the men in carrying lumber from a pile intended for rigs, and in a short time we had a shed constructed, under which we put the women and children for the night. With our pocket-knives we then cut hemlock boughs, spreading them deeply upon the ground floor upon which they could rest and sleep.

This done, we sat around in groups, with our backs against the sheltering trunks of trees, discussing the fire which raged along the ridge above us.

The heavy rain soon checked the progress of the fire, so by three o'clock in the morning I ventured back to where our little home had stood. A few smouldering coals, in the midst of which lay the cook stove on its side, was all that remained. The place was the top of the ridge, and commanded an excellent view, especially since the trees had been stripped by the ravage of the fire.

As I stood and gazed over the country the sight which met my eyes defied description—I shall never forget it. Throughout the vacant forest, far and near, countless dry snags, resembling pillows of fire, stood burning.

Countless flowing wells were spurting a fountain of fire hundreds of feet into the air. So soon as one would cease, as if to gather force for the next flow, another would begin; how grand, yet how fearful it looked. The old tradition of hell being situated in the bowels of the earth seemed true, and the fancy

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

took me that every hole penetrated to the infernal regions below, and through them the devilish fury, pent up for ages, was let loose.

Alone, seated upon a rock near the ruins of my home, unmindful of the rain, I watched with a feeling of awe that wonderful panorama of fire.

Mr. Dean's first instruction was to shut the valve on every well. This, he reasoned, and rightly too, would keep the gas out of the air, and save what oil the well would flow in case it did catch fire. The well which had burned near our dwelling had been thus attended to, and it was not far from where I was sitting. All that was left of it was the charred walking-beam hanging nearly vertical from its saddle on the Sampson-post.

With a crack I saw it topple and fall, and as it went down it broke off the lead line upon which was the closed valve, and simultaneous with the fall I had before my startled gaze another burning fountain similar to the one I had been watching from a distance. Jumping to my feet, I rushed back just in time to escape the shower of burning oil.

When day broke, and the sun rose and shamed into insignificance the light of the gas and oil, what a scene of devastation!—where the town had stood not a house remained.

Where hundreds of oil derricks had stood, proudly poised in their vigil over the wells to which they had given existence, not one remained—the destruction was complete.

## A N AWFUL FIRE

The mariner may love his ship. So, too, does the driller his rig. Sick at heart, I turned from the sight and retraced my steps to the shed where I had left my mother.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

**A**FTER the great fire I lost no time. It had become quite difficult to procure experienced drillers; many of the "old timers" from the lower field were quite helpless in trying to keep track of their tools in the deep territory of the upper belt. It was the "deep hole driller" that was in demand.

Anxious to get to the front, and having obtained all of my training in the deep field, I looked upon this as the opportunity of my life, and diligently set about to become a contractor myself. In many ways I was governed by the advice of my mother, as she had assumed control of my saving fund, and when enough had been accumulated I purchased my first string of tools and began my career as a contractor for drilling oil wells.

Managing my business conservatively I soon procured the confidence of the Oil Well Supply Companies, and receiving a generous credit at their hands, I was enabled to put ten strings of tools in the field.

To avoid fishing jobs, the curse of the trade, I took no chances or risks on anything. As soon as a cable had drilled its quota of wells it was immediately dis-

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

carded to the junk pile, and replaced by a new one. Competitors called me extravagant; experience, however, had taught me the wisdom of avoiding unnecessary risks.

It was not long until the wells were resuscitated, and with new ones coming in every day the capacity of the Standard was again severely taxed; and the price of crude oil taking a downward trend, aroused in the producers a feeling of antagonism; they would now teach the great giant a "Jack and the Bean Stalk" lesson, by threatening to chop down his main supports.

They banded secretly, and when organization had been well established, the "Intimidating Movement" was set on foot; the first act of which was to brand every piece of Standard property with a large circle, inside of which was either chalked or painted a skull and cross-bones.

Naturally, I took sides with the producer; and when an invitation to join the "Pie-Faces," as they were called, was extended me, I readily allowed my name to be presented before the great mogul, whose throne, I was told, was at Tarport.

In due time, and much to my gratification, I was notified to be present upon a certain night and receive my initiation into the mystic order of "Pie-Faces."

The name was lacking in dignity, and while I did not like it, I felt the cause to be a just one; we must scare the Standard into submission.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

No one was allowed to tell where the meetings were held, and the greatest secrecy was maintained; it was the puzzle of the day. According to my instructions, given verbally of course, I was to wait at a certain place, and when a man passed me uttering the words "Pipe-Lines," I was to follow him, and not to speak unless spoken to.

The place designated was a certain ravine in front of a magazine in which were stored hundreds of quarts of nitro-glycerine. It was nearing midnight, and the lonesomeness of the hour, coupled with fear of the deadly explosive, made my wait a disagreeable one.

Finally a man emerged from the woods above, and as he passed beside me, uttered in an undertone the signal to follow. Without a word I followed him into the city. Into a dark alley he turned cautiously, and when beyond the rays of the flickering lights from the street lamps, stopped and whispered into my ear, "Your name is Smith—John Smith. Be sure and give no other."

Finally we stopped before a large, squatly structure; it was pitchy dark and all within seemed quiet as the grave. A sense of uneasiness crept through me, but I said nothing, as the thought that I was with friends reassured me.

Mounting a short flight of stairs, my guide rapped upon the door. Presently it opened, and he led me into a dark room. The air was sultry. I was conscious of many others being in the same room, and

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

from an adjacent one came the low hum of many voices talking in subdued tones. The whole affair made me nervous.

For some time we waited in the gloom; it was weird, to say the least. "What is your name?" was whispered by a strange voice in my ear. Recalling my instructions, I answered, "Smith—John Smith."

"'Tis well, fear no evil; but before you can be admitted into this noble fraternity, are you willing to have your friends test your faith?" My questioner pressed my hand firmly as he spoke.

"I am," I replied.

"Gentlemen," was called in a loud whisper, "John Smith is ready for your test."

A bag was then pulled over my head and adjusted around my neck. Taking me by either arm, two guides now led me into the room from which I had heard the voices.

All became still as we entered, and then, after walking many times about the great hall, I heard the stroke of a gavel, and a deep sonorous voice commanding "Halt! Stand perfectly still, we will always be near you!" With this I was left standing—I knew not where.

Again the voice broke the silence. "Noble Pie-Faces," it began, "we have here to-night one John Smith, who, having been vouched for by one of our number, stands before you seeking admission into our society. What say ye, challenge or no challenge?"

"No challenge," was the reply.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"'Tis well! 'tis well! John Smith, you are about to take the oath of loyalty; its violation is death. Are you ready and willing under such penalty to have us proceed?"

Again I answered, "I am."

"Then repeat after me: I, John Smith, in the presence of the 'Pie-Faces' assembled, do solemnly swear that inasmuch as it has pleased the Great Rocka-feller to pay us what he damn pleases for our oil, I shall give myself up to the Mystic Order of Pie-Faces, and bend every effort to intimidate that branch of the Standard known to us as the United Pipe Lines, and should I ever fail in the fulfillment of this, may disgrace and everlasting ruin be my lot."

When I had repeated this formula, the guides laid hold of my arms again. "Come, we are not satisfied yet; are you willing to obstruct the pipe line?"

"Yes," I answered, supposing they meant as my previous oath had indicated.

"Then, down on your knees!" Anxious to have the "Black Cap" removed from my head, and to expedite matters, I promptly obeyed all commands. Falling upon my knees I awaited further instructions.

"John Smith, you are now kneeling before the opening of the stupendous Pipe Line System. Our enemies have willed that every barrel of oil produced from our wells must pass through this before reaching a market. I now command you to crawl into it, and keep going until you emerge at the other end, no matter where that may be."

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

Seizing me by the head and shoulders, I was forced into what seemed a large smoke-stack. On and on I wormed my way, the smoothness of the iron assuring me that many others had preceded me on the same journey before. It was a long journey, and I thought the end would never come. My knees—for it was on them I was compelled to creep—began to pain me. The absurdity of the maneuver was anything but elevating, and I wished that I had kept out of it. At length I emerged, and much to my surprise, felt the carpet of the room.

Again I was taken by the arm, and led across the floor in front of the “High Mucky Muck.”

“John Smith,” he began in the same heavy voice, “you have gone through that Pipe Line System with courage; you are a credit to this beloved order of ‘Pie-Faces,’ and are now a ‘First Degree Member.’ The guides will now conduct you to the ‘B. S.’ dump room.”

I was then led up a flight of stairs and given a seat in a small car. I say car—I learned afterward that it *was* a car. A couple of ropes were placed in my hands, with instructions to ‘hang on,’ and then the thing was pushed over an incline, and sped like mad down a track. The air caught the bag over my head and pressed it closely to my face. Suddenly the car stopped against a buffer, and amid the laughing crowd I was thrown headlong into a net.

“The Standard has caught you in its ‘producers’ net,’ John Smith,” said a voice, “but if you will stay with your gang, all will be well.” The net was

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

lowered to the floor, and to my delight, the black cap was taken from my head. What a sight! the room was full of men, their faces covered with pie crust moulded over the entire head. I was now in a position to understand the significance of the term "Pie-Faces."

One of their number stepped forward and handed me a glass of water. "Drink," he said; "this is pure benzine." I took the tumbler and drank the contents in one draught. I was then instructed to take off my shoes. When I had accomplished this a "Pie-Face" advanced from an adjoining room, carrying a box which seemed to be about three feet square and ten inches deep.

This he placed at my feet, and removing the lid exposed a square hard wood plank, upon the surface of which were fastened a hundred or more projecting spikes; and lifting it from the box, he set it upon my lap for inspection.

The spikes were probably six inches long, smoothly polished, and tapered to a point as sharp as a needle. After I had examined it thoroughly, he replaced it in the box and returned to the room. The sharp spikes were not suggestive of pleasant thoughts to a man in his stocking feet.

"Follow me!" I looked up to see who had given the command, and was confronted by one of the members who was armed with a seven-foot gauge-pole, upon the end of which was fastened a twelve-inch monkey-wrench.

Leading me into the room from where the fellow

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

had brought the block of spikes, I was instructed to stand directly under a miniature tubing-block, depended in the regular way from a double line transmitted through two small holes in the ceiling. Pulling the tackle down till the hook was within reach of my hands, the guide commanded me to lay hold of the clamps, and to hang on until instructed to do otherwise. Catching hold as I was bidden, the pulley began to ascend till I hung suspended by my arms some three feet from the floor, and at this juncture the lights went out, leaving us in total darkness.

How long I was kept in gloom is impossible to tell; but when the lights were again turned on, I was surprised at finding myself the sole occupant of the room. I swung around, this way and that, but they had all deserted me.

What did it mean? I looked toward the floor, and to my terror saw that I was hanging over the hideous spikes. To let go now meant to drop with unprotected feet directly on to the projecting points. A feeling of desperation seized me, as I pictured how my weight would drive those infernal things through the bones and flesh of my feet. I saw but one thing to do, work my body into a swinging motion and jump beyond them. I tried to draw up my legs; it was impossible, for they were encircled by iron hoops guyed in every direction to the wall.

"Gentlemen, you are carrying this too far," I cried; "I rebel against such mutilation."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

No one answered, everything seemed as still as death.

"For God's sake, fellows," I cried again, "this is barbarous." Again my voice died away into the oppressive silence. The suspense grew sickening; my arms were tiring under the constant strain; madly I tried to free my limbs from the rings, but found it impossible. Great drops of cold sweat covered my body, and stood in beads upon my forehead. I swore vengeance on every member.

My struggle to free my legs had completely exhausted me, and I felt I must let go and face the inevitable. Hearing a noise overhead, I looked up; a new hole appeared in the ceiling, through which was thrust a hand holding a knife. With one sweep it severed the rope, and the next instant I thought I felt the sharp points pierce my feet through and through, and in a frenzy I reached down to extricate the cruel steel, when to my surprise, as well as delight, I discovered that the spikes upon which I had just fallen were but a rubber imitation of the ones given me to examine.

That my feet were still intact was hard to believe, so vivid had become my imagination during the agonizing moments of my suspense. The crowd entered the room, and again I was helped to my feet.

"John Smith," said the same voice that had conferred the first degree, "you are the goods, you have stood the test like a hero, and I now declare you a

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

full-fledged ‘Pie-Face,’ entitled to all the rights and privileges of this order.

“Fellows,” he said, addressing the men, “give John Smith his shoes, and escort him to the kitchen for his pie.” My pie consisted of a large sheet of dough which I suffered to have moulded to my head and face. Cutting out openings through which to see and breathe, the man who had the dough told us to go forth, and with the throng, place the sign of destruction upon everything the Standard owned.

Two by two we filed out of the hall into the alley, marching through the main streets like a battalion of ghosts. Outside the city we broke ranks, and made a run for the city of tanks the Standard had erected between Tarport and Limestone.

Here the work of intimidating commenced. With paint and chalk the skull and cross-bones were outlined upon the sides of every tank, and here and there we wrote threats, assuring Mr. Rockafeller that unless he raised the price of oil every tank would be fired and burned to the ground.

The day was beginning to break over the eastern hills before we returned to the barracks. When the dough had been removed from the faces of the crowd, I was more than amused to see many of my intimate friends among them.

The pipe-line through which I had been compelled to crawl was merely two sections of smoke-stack, laid end to end upon the floor, and as soon as I emerged from one section into the other the rear one was lifted

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

up and placed in front of the one through which I was going, and so on, producing the belief that I was traversing through one continuous tube.

Beyond the placing of night watchmen around their properties, the Standard paid no attention to the "Mystic Order of Pie-faces" or their threats; but instead tried to point out the absurdity of opening up the territory while so much oil was being held in stock, and argued that the only thing they could do was to discourage the drill by keeping down the price till such time as the congestion of their stock tanks could be relieved.

The "Shut Down Movement" was then suggested, and being one of the large contractors it fell to me to take up our side of the question, and with others, compel the producer to keep our tools going according to all previously made agreements.

Finally joint committees were appointed by the various interests, and instructed to meet at Oil City that a definite plan might be arranged. At the preliminaries I was made chairman, and in looking around to collect my forces I discovered it would probably take several months before I could effect a satisfactory understanding of the position relative to one another's interest.

In the meantime the wells showed signs of declining; many had ceased to flow, and had to be pumped. This was practically the condition of things in the oil regions of Pennsylvania when one morning it was announced by the press that Standard Oil had just

## MYSTIC ORDER OF PIE-FACES

succeeded in getting control of the great oil fields of Russia, and for no other purpose than the protection of the American product in European markets.

Following this the price of oil took an upward trend, and producer, refiner and contractor grew hopeful; obstinacy was lost, and the committees convened just before the opening of the holidays.

With the oil market steadily advancing, and the Russian field out of business, we regarded the occasion as in keeping with the season, a regular holiday; the meeting was a farce, and no action, beyond having a good time, was taken.

During my stay I met several of Oil City's best people, through whom I was invited to attend a ball, given for some benevolent cause. I had never been taught to dance, and knew so little of the ways of society that on first thought I declined the invitation, but after further consideration I decided to go.

Mr. Weatherbee, to whom I was personally indebted for the invitation, urged me to attend, stating that it would be a very informal affair, and that if I did not care to be a participant I would enjoy it as a spectator.

The day following was the last before Christmas, and I fully intended going home that I might spend Christmas with my mother; but about two o'clock in the afternoon, just as I was making ready for the train, Mr. Weatherbee called at the hotel to induce me to remain for the evening and join a Christmas

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Eve sleighing party that he and his sister had planned giving that night.

"Miss Smedley requested that you be invited," he said, referring to a young lady I had met at the ball. I required no further persuasion, but accepted, and the next day, Christmas, when I took my departure, it was with a feeling that if such a thing as love existed, I was in love with the young lady whom I had met for the first time the evening before, at the Charity Ball.

Returning home, I told my dear little mother all that had transpired during my absence, dwelling at length upon the girl who had made such an impression upon me; and when I mentioned the names of Weatherbee and Smedley to her she looked up inquiringly and interrupted me by asking, "Oh, John, surely it could not have been the little Nina Smedley who lived near us on the river hill in Clarion County; and the gentleman whom you met, a son of that miserable old Weatherbee your unfortunate father worked for on the 'Nelly?'"

It had not occurred to me, but now I remembered that they called her "Nina" when she left the sleigh. "You are right, mother," I replied, "why didn't I think of it? Ah, well, she will answer my note, and when she does, we can find out more about her."

## CHAPTER XXI

### WIND OIL

FOR days I anxiously watched the incoming mail, fully believing she would answer the brief note I had taken the liberty of sending by a messenger; but as time passed, and days grew to weeks and weeks to a month, I began to despair, concluding that I had perhaps overstepped the bounds of propriety, and should not expect a reply.

Still, with the vicissitudes of the past clearly in mind, I hoped, for love will hope, where reason would despair; but, too proud to write again, I tried to dismiss the whole affair from my mind.

“Why let it trouble you?” was a question I frequently asked myself; but believing in my heart that she was the “Little Nina” of early days—days of happy childhood, festooned with life’s fondest memories, who could blame me for longing to see or hear from her?

She did not seem like one who would be easily offended, yet I did not know—girls were hard to understand. A month—two months passed, and I received no word from her, nor did I realize—we never do—that the thing was making me moody, until Boyd took it upon himself to inquire. Since the fire we had become like brothers, for although he was

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

many years my senior, his simplicity of character was so child-like that I felt myself inclined to regard him as a tender charge, especially when pay day was at hand. Poor Jim, how I loved him!

When I had finished a well in unusually good time he would pat me on the arm and say, "Didn't I tell you, way back in your 'kid' days, how anybody could drill?" Then with an upward thrust of his arms he would remind me when he had held me, as a boy, at arm's length above his head. "Johnny, I never thought you'd get to be bigger'n me, but you got 'em all skinned now."

As a driller he had few equals. "He certainly can make hole," was a common expression. I took him into my employ, giving him charge of a string of tools, and sought his advice upon all difficult problems.

His greatest fault was drink; realizing that I had an influence over him, I exerted it for his good, but it seemed impossible for the poor fellow to overcome this tendency.

"What's the matter with you lately, Johnny?" he asked. "You don't act like your old self."

His question had one good effect—it brought me to my senses. Of course, I could not tell him what was on my mind, so I replied, "Nothing, old man, only I've been worrying about your drinking; you are too good a man to throw yourself away; quit it for me, Jim, won't you?"

For a moment he gazed steadily upon the ground. "No," he said, looking up, "I shall never stop. I feel

## WIND OIL

bad that I can't promise you t'other way, but facts is facts—I can't stop."

"Why, Jim?" I asked.

"Cause I can't; just why I don't know, but it's a feeling that comes over me, and I feel 'zif I was going to be smothered or hung or something awful like, and I try to fight it off, and do for awhile, but when I gets to the place where I think I'm going right crazy mad, I know it's drink I want, for liquor, John, always cures the spell.

"I 'member how I used to promise your daddy when we worked on the 'Nelly,' but I couldn't help filling up when the feeling came on—Lord, I just *had* to get it.

"You can't understand it, John, 'cause you never had the feeling, but it is hell on earth; and when the spell is on, you would sell your soul into hell twice over rather than go without liquor; liquor is the only medicine for the spell, for I've tried more'n a dozen doctors' medicine, but it didn't work, nothing but the 'red eye' does the business."

"What is this feeling you speak of?" I asked.

"Well, first you get the blues; then you get to fussin' and stewin' 'bout everything and anything, nothing goes right, and everything is wrong; then comes the trembling feeling, and you think you can't do anything right; then you gets sad and downhearted like, and wish you were dead; then you thinks of the liquor, and you know it will drive all these from you—that's all, John, and I've made up my mind to get it just as

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

soon as the blues come, for there's no use in fighting it."

Fabulous stories of fortunes made in a day in the Oil Exchange were coming from Oil City, so I decided to invest some of my earnings in a similar manner, as this would afford me an opportunity of visiting the city again, and perchance I might be able to see Miss Smedley.

"Jim," I said, "you have made the drinking habit clear to me, and I fully realize and pity your condition, but do the best there is in you. I am going away for a week or so, and while I am gone I want you to attend to everything. If a 'spell' comes on before I return, telegraph me care of Exchange, Oil City, and I'll come back in time to let you break it."

The great delight I had taken in looking after my men, the pleasure it was to keep records of the wells drilled, the happiness I experienced in watching a well being drilled, in fact, all the joy which comes from the assurance of success, was giving way to the disturbed faculties of a brain whose possessor was in love.

"Nina, Nina!" I could no more help thinking of her than could Boyd resist the temptation of the "spell." So full had my mind become with thoughts of her that the laboring beams, as they swung the heavy tools up and down, seemed to speak out her name, "Ni-na, Ni-na."

By April oil had reached the dollar mark. The production was rapidly falling off, and the producers, since the excitement of drilling gushers had abated,

were flocking to the Exchange to invest in certificate oil. That the market would go above two or three dollars was predicted.

Now was my time to act. I would go to Oil City on the pretense of buying oil on margin, but secretly with the hope of seeing the girl I loved; so giving Boyd a few instructions, and cautioning him regarding the proper measurements of the "sand," that the "shooter" could be able to place his torpedo where the best results would be obtained, I packed my grip, and kissing the little mother good-by, walked through the woods to the narrow-gauge station which had been dubbed "McCalmont."

Reaching the platform, I met Mr. Dean. He strode up and down, making survey of the supplies which the way-freight had scattered promiscuously in front of the warehouse.

"Hello, Payne," he said, in his usual pleasant way, "Where going with your picca-dilly collar? Gosh! you look like a senator."

I told him. "Lots of fellows getting rich down there, I hear, so thought I would try it myself."

"Well, no wonder the boys say you are queer of late; don't be foolish, John, and chase phantoms. Speculation is rife, now, to be sure, but mark my word, there's bound to be a reaction, and when it comes," he said with a laugh, "there'll be wreck of matter and crush of—"

"Worlds?" I added.

"No," he continued, "but of producers."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Hang on to your money and leave the other fellow 'buck the tiger.' Be in shape to buy production, for when it comes, and come it will, good leases can be bought for a song.

"Look at the number who have recklessly mortgaged their all to secure money to buy and load up with certificate oil; if anything develops to depress the market there'll be one of the worst calamities that ever struck the financial side of oildom. Think it over carefully," he said, turning to go back on the lease where a new storage tank was being erected.

As he started away he handed me a copy of the *Oil City Derrick*, the official organ of the petroleum industry. "Look that over and see the list of men who bought yesterday in the Exchange more oil than the Standard have in stock, more than is on top of the ground to-day. I call it 'wind oil,' and when the wind once gets to blowing, their certificates will be scattered like useless chaff. Keep away from it," were his parting words.

Of course he did not know that I had another object in going, so I said nothing, but thanked him for the paper.

When his broad hat and shoulders had vanished among the trees, I seated myself upon a new bull-wheel shaft and turned to the list of names whose possessors had invested heavily in oil, and noticed Smedley's and Weatherbee's were among them.

I read the list through, and then let my eyes creep back and rest upon the name which was uppermost

## WIND OIL

in my thoughts. "Smedley!" and then a strange coincidence—looking opposite the name, I read, "Twenty thousand, *Series 9-a.*"

"9-a," her name, Nina, it seemed I could not evade it; and the thought came to me, "Is she to be mine? Do I love her? Is she the only girl I ever loved?" True, I had met other girls, and girls too who were charming, but none that had ever made such a lasting impression upon me.

With eyes fixed upon the name, I sat deeply meditating. "Would I see her?" At the thought my heart would bound like the impulsive thud of a new well. Then mechanically I turned the paper and fell to reading items of general interest.

Suddenly, as I opened the pages there appeared in heavy type the names, "Smedley—Weatherbee," and immediately below I read "A quiet wedding at the home of the bride; Miss Nina Smedley to George Weatherbee."

Married!—my first impulse was to do something desperate. Nina, my Nina, married. My God! what had life for me now? I tried to reason and be strong, I tried to make light of it; other girls I had known came into my mind, why not love one of them?

Ah! think as I would, reason as I might, I could not banish it from my mind, my heart was broken, my fondest hopes were gone. No wonder she did not answer my letter.

"I have been a fool," this was the most consoling thought, for it pricked my vanity. I had lost the

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

slippers, and while the trip to the sea would never be forgotten, I felt myself lifted back to my former self. My mother and my work would claim me now, never to stray away again.

The unexpected touch of a hand upon my shoulder startled me. It was Mr. Dean.

"Here yet?" he asked.

"Yes," I quickly returned, folding the paper that he might not see what I had been reading, "and I have concluded to take your advice, as I have seen enough in this paper to convince me that going to Oil City would be the act of a fool, and I am glad, and thank you for the timely advice you have given me."

## CHAPTER XXII

### OIL IS BOOMING

AS George parted from Nina at the door he turned and watched her as she vanished into the hall.

How womanly she looked in her long black coat as she passed beneath the rays of the hall light. Through the glass panel of the door, he, concealed by the darkness of the night, kept his eyes fixed on her till she disappeared.

"She is a beauty," he mused, and returned to his carriage. In a sullen mood he reached home and found Grace still up, evidently awaiting his return, for something had told her that he would propose to Nina that night, and with the curiosity characteristic of her sex she deferred retiring until she learned the result. Besides, had she not promised to aid and advise him in the matter?

"Your trip was made rather quickly, for a man in love," she ventured kindly; "really, I didn't expect you for an hour yet."

"It's cold enough outside, without losing time conversing with an icicle," he returned, lighting a cigarette and seating himself before the fire-place.

"Icicle!" There was woman enough in Grace to understand the import of his remark. If Nina had

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

rejected her brother, she would never like her again.

"Why are you so moody? Tell me, dear, has she rejected you?"

He puffed vigorously at his cigarette.

"Tell me," she repeated coaxingly, whereupon he nodded his head affirmatively.

She went to his side and laid a hand consolingly upon his head. "Tell me about it; what did she say?"

After a few moments' hesitation, he looked up into her face; upon his own, antagonized selfishness was plainly written.

"Oh, I knew she would turn me down, but I'll bend that proud neck of hers some day; she's a sly little witch, but she can't monkey with me."

"George! George! how *can* you be so hateful! You didn't express yourself so vehemently to her, I hope, did you?"

"No, I'm no fool, I'll wait till she is mine."

"You grieve me when you talk in this unreasonable way, I would rather you would never be successful in winning her, if I thought you would abuse her—poor Nina would die under harsh words."

"Well, she'll not die very soon then," he said, relenting a little, "but when she's mine, perhaps she'll not be so cutting in her remarks."

"If you win her, I am sure you will have no occasion for such tantrums, and it is ungallant, if not unfair for you to be angry; for a girl, no matter who, cannot attain at a bound to a love she has never suspected. Tell me what you said and what she said,

## OIL IS BOOMING

for if I'm to be coacher and adviser I must know all."

When he had related all that had happened, his sister broke into hearty laughter. "Why, you silly boy! I never thought you would make so much fuss about trifles! All girls want a man who is in love with them to think they are not too easily won. Don't let that discourage you, but press your suit persistently, with vim and earnestness.

"There is nothing a woman admires so much as seeing a man ardently trying to win her; in fact, it is a trick common to womankind to reject the first proposal of the man one would be willing to die for. If I loved a man to distraction, and he asked me to be his wife, I would refuse him as flatly as Nina did you; but I would expect him to be as the gallant knights of old, and win me by faithful and unchanging affection.

"Play it, George, as you would a game of checkers; jump every obstacle she places before you, strike boldly for the king row, win it, crown yourself with one of her defeated barriers, and start back determined to sweep everything from your way.

"Girls are queer, George, but so long as they have their habitation in flesh and blood, love will sway and conquer them; and whatever you do, don't be timid; timidity in a man freezes the heart of a woman into stone. The old saying, 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' is true.

"Show her by word, act and deed, that you are fearless; any argument she may offer to dissuade you,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

be ready at a word to offset; let nothing thwart you or your purpose, and when she sees at last how unwilling you are to yield to her refusals, she will become mere clay in your hands; then you can mould her by kindness and affection into your own mind and thought and your lives will go on together as one, your hopes being hers, her joys being yours."

Had Nina ever suspected how cleverly Grace was teaching her brother to woo, she would not have been so mystified in trying to understand why George so persistently continued to bore her with declarations of love.

There is much that is pleasant and much that is disagreeable in most natures; but the one or the other predominates in all. George had a struggle to keep his pleasanter aspects upon the surface. His disagreeable tendencies, mostly the result of having been pampered during his youth, and the strain under which his sister kept him to resist the fire of Nina's refusals, taxed his patience to the utmost.

In the meantime, Mr. Weatherbee was not unmindful of his son's attitude toward the daughter of his friend Smedley, and in his heart he secretly hoped to see it culminate in their marriage; and not knowing the part his daughter was taking in the matter, he naturally attributed George's reformation to Nina's influence, and nursed the belief that the change was permanent. "A good girl can always take the 'kinks' out of a fellow," he thought, "Nina will be the making of him; the change already is marvelous."

## OIL IS BOOMING

Knowing how full of pseudo-pride Smedley was regarding whom his daughter should marry, and recalling the maxim, "There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," he resolved to take a hand in the affair himself, and fortify his son in a way that in the eyes of Smedley would make him eligible.

Weatherbee chuckled to himself. "Pshaw, he dare not refuse her to my son. I have tried for years to outwit him, but his conservatism has been the stumbling block; but I knew that time and patience would be necessary, and so I've waited. But now everything he owns I have covered by mortgage, even his home. Let him dare to refuse her and I'll break the market if I have to sell every certificate at twenty cents. Ah! it would break his heart to be put out of that palace he dotes so much on."

From day to day, as people passed by the Exchange, they would stop and listen to the mob of howling brokers within. "Lunatic asylum," would invariably be their comment.

Never did such excitement prevail in the buying of certificate oil. Steadily the market advanced. One dollar, one dollar and five, ten, fifteen, twenty was reached. No one wanted to sell. It was buy!buy!buy!

Reports of "dry holes" came fast and faster from the McKean field. Rumors were afloat that the oil industry would soon be a thing of history, as no more productive territory was being found. "Wild cats" were being drilled in Warren, Forest, Elk, Potter and other counties, but no oil was discovered.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

From the gallery of the Exchange, Nina Smedley and Grace Weatherbee watched the struggle of the maddened brokers around the "Bull-Ring" blow.

Such confusion, such noise, such crazy running about! To the spectator it was a jumble, but the indicator on the wall, with seeming intelligence, recorded every fluctuation as it was made from the ring.

Nina watched her father going about below, and noticed that he looked pale and anxious. Not a minute passed that he did not look toward the indicator on the wall, the hand-writing, as it were.

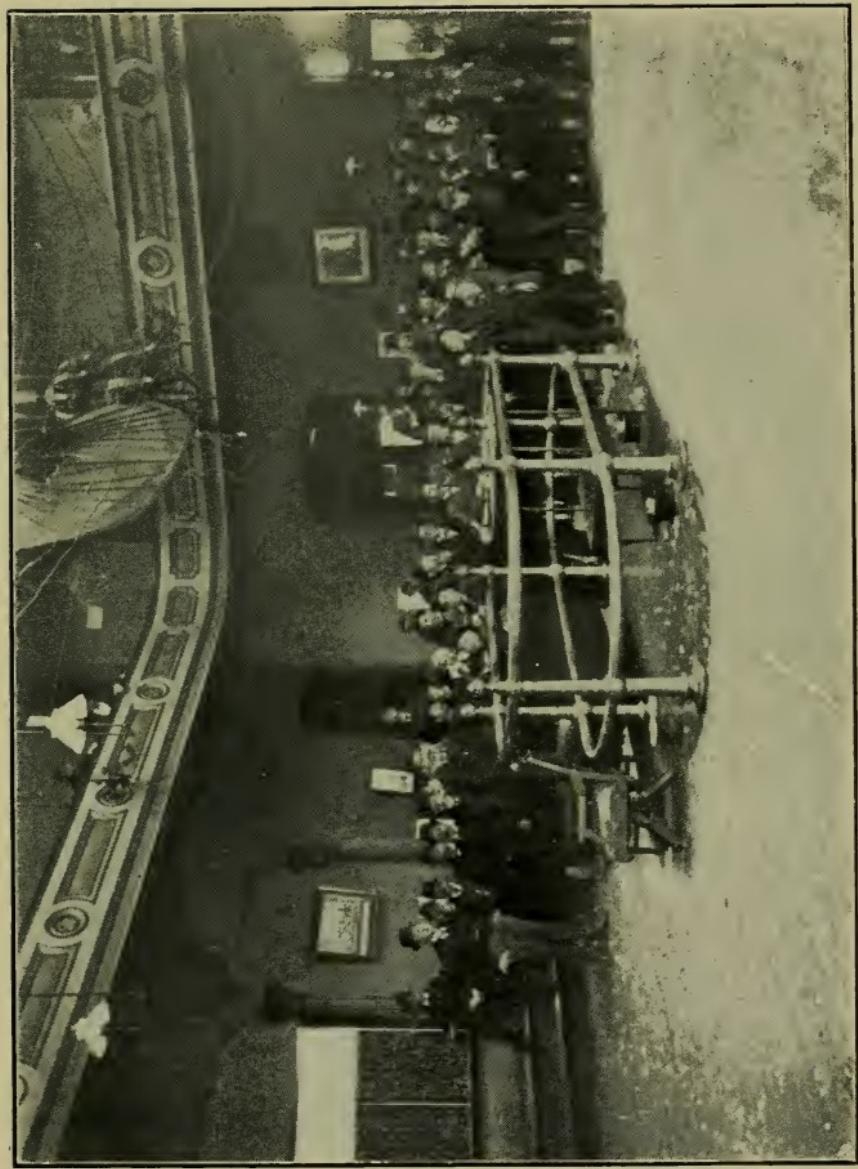
Steadily upward turned the hand upon the dial. It pointed now to one dollar and twenty-five. Weatherbee entered, and calling a broker to one side, handed him a slip of paper. Smedley saw him and walked to where he stood.

The eyes of the girls were upon them, and while unable to hear a word, the actions of the men excited their curiosity.

"Ah, Smedley, just been looking for you," Weatherbee said. Taking him by the arm and drawing him to one side of the room, he took from his pocket a certificate representing fifty thousand barrels of oil, and held it between his thumb and fore-finger.

"This," he said, "is for my son when he marries. Fifty thousand barrels bought at fifty cents, and now worth"—he pointed across the room where the hand remained fixed at one dollar and twenty-five cents.

"Smedley, we are winners. I coaxed you into this



*Amos Steffee delivering to Charles Lamberton the last oil certificate of the Exchange.*



## OIL IS BOOMING

deal knowing we were bound to win. I never lose sight of my friends."

"I fully appreciate it," Mr. Smedley replied; "you have always been right in your speculative judgment."

"You limit my judgment then, to speculation only?"

"No! no! not that, Weatherbee. Your judgment is right on everything."

"I hope so, Smedley," said the other, returning the certificate to his pocket; "there's another matter I wish to speak of upon which I hope my judgment is right, too."

"What is it?"

"Smedley, we have known each other a long time, and I have always liked you and your family; my son is in love with Nina, and wishes to have her for his wife. She is a sweet girl, and one any man might be justly proud to call daughter. Personally, she is the only girl I know of in the town that could, with my consent, marry into my family. We all love her, and to see her a daughter to us both, you and I, who have been cronies for so long, would make me a very proud man indeed."

For a moment the expression of Smedley's face became fixed and vacant.

"Of course," Weatherbee continued, "George has been a little wild, but we all had our wild oats to dispose of, you know; I'll start him right by building them one of the finest homes in the city. Come now, Smedley, I speak for George, can he have her?"

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Smedley made no reply, for parting with his daughter, who had been so much to him since the death of his wife, was a hard thing to contemplate. He tried to imagine the loneliness of going home day after day, and no little girl to greet him. He pictured himself going about the house with no Nina to comfort him in hours of depression. The excited throng around the "Bull Ring" seemed like misty phantoms in his eyes; for a moment he was wrapped in the gloom of emotion.

"Don't consider it from a selfish standpoint," Weatherbee continued, seeming to read his thoughts, "You must expect to give her up some day, and better to the son of a neighbor, ay, a friend, than to some fellow who, perhaps, will take her far away. We both are able to see them started right, and when you give your consent, this certificate goes into the bank to their credit."

Nina watched her father from where she sat in the gallery, and by intuition knew that Weatherbee was planning for her to become the wife of his son.

An unusual din came from the brokers and all eyes turned to the indicator, which registered one dollar and thirty. The roars became deafening. One-thirty-five—one-forty—and she saw her father and Weatherbee rush into the crowd of exultant producers that swarmed around the railing of the pit. Again the hand of the indicator jumped forward—one-forty-two-and-a-half—one-forty-five!

Messenger boys streamed in converse lines between

## OIL IS BOOMING

the telegraph room and that hot-bed of excitement. The street outside became blocked, "Oil is booming," was passed from mouth to mouth along the street.

Just as the clock was about to strike three, the words "CLOSED AT" appeared above the indicator, and the pointer jumped to "ONE DOLLAR AND FIFTY!"

Hats were thrown into the air, men patted each other on the back, buyers pressed forward, clasping the hands of their brokers to leave bank notes within their grasp, the crowd filed out, and soon the place of wild commotion calmed down to the quiet of an empty church.

Some inward conviction told Smedley he should not consent to his daughter marrying George Weatherbee, and yet when Weatherbee renewed the subject at the office he was unable to give a reason against it.

"I will think it over, but first I will consult her wishes in the matter. Personally, I could offer no objection."

The thing perplexed him; he hardly knew what to think about it. "Would I make a mistake?" Ah, that was the question which haunted him. "Pshaw! he might make the best of husbands; the fellow is bright, too; being an only son accounts for his wildness."

Then he thought of the certificate, of the fortune he had doubled, aye, trebled, by the advice and persuasion of his friend—it would be no more than right to unite the families. "And suppose I should

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

die! then she would, I know, marry that Payne fellow, who, no doubt, would go through with all I had made. Ah, it is plain, I will insist on it."

This was the way in which he turned it over in his mind. How fond people are of deceiving themselves; and while no one can do so, still one frequently acts contrary to his better judgment. Smedley was in the same predicament, for reason as he would something kept telling him not to do it—"He is not worthy of her."

In this state of mind he returned from his office that evening. After supper he became ill at ease, and moved about the house in a state of nervous irritability.

"Why are you so fidgety to-night, papa?" Nina asked him.

"I am not well," he pleaded.

"You didn't look well in the Exchange this afternoon."

"Where were you?" he asked in surprise.

"In the gallery, Grace and I were there together."

"I noticed there was quite an audience of ladies," he returned.

"Why did Mr. Weatherbee take you to one side?" Grace asked.

"Oh, nothing much," he replied, trying to appear indifferent.

"Wasn't it something concerning me? George, since the night Grace gave her reception, has been bothering me to become his wife. Wasn't it for your sanction he was asking?"

## OIL IS BOOMING

"Yes, it was," he answered, somewhat amazed at his daughter's intuition.

"I do not care for him, papa, I love his sister—we have been as sisters, but I positively dislike her brother. Tell them, won't you, papa, that it cannot be, and unless George deters from his silly love speeches, you will sever our friendly connection with the family?" She felt sure he would comply with this request, but when he began to prevaricate, she was at her wits' end to understand.

"I was not aware till to-day, when his father spoke of it to me, that George had any such intentions. And I am surprised that you have kept me in ignorance of it. This must be a new idea of yours, for evidently, you have been encouraging him."

"Encouraging him!" she repeated, "why, papa——"

"Don't interrupt me," he said sharply, giving way to his ill humor. "I told his father 'I had no personal objections,' for I have thought it over carefully, and believe you might do worse. His father is wealthy, and they are a highly respected family, and George is capable of giving you the home and surroundings I want to see you in. I will not decide it, but think it over carefully before you make any rash decisions."

As her father spoke, Nina grew impatient. "Why do you harp on the 'home' part of it, papa? Many a bird is sad and wretched in a gilded cage, and I could not be happy with George Weatherbee, in a palace. If I ever marry, it will be for love; then I could be happy in a hovel.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Think how happy you and mother were when we lived on the river hill."

"Yes, when you played with Johnny Payne," he quickly interrupted. "I know you prefer to marry him, if you could, Nina. I have not been blind since Christmas Eve; you are a changed girl, and I say you must get that fellow out of your head, and unless you do, I will insist on your marrying George."

Nina sighed heavily, but made no reply, for it seemed to her now that the whole world was against her.

Her father continued, "Think how his father has been carrying my paper since the boom in the Exchange. Think how constantly you have been at their home and accepted of their hospitality, and think how ungrateful of you to now try to reflect discredit upon the brother of the girl you have pretended all these years to love."

"Father! papa!" she cried in despair, "What on earth does it mean? Oh, you don't understand. I don't want to reflect on him, I merely don't love him enough to be his wife. My God! you are trying to kill me."

Falling on her knees by his chair, she wept bitterly, and like all men, Mr. Smedley was unable to see a woman weep. Impulsively he left the house and returned to his office. Nina heard the hall door close after him; the feeling which beset her was that of dire longing for the one she loved, believing that he, if there, would be the one to whom she could go with her trouble.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

IT was early May. The maple trees bordering the lawn surrounding the Smedley home were putting forth their tender leaves, through which the robin and the sparrow chirruped joyously together.

The air, soft and balmy, blowing gently from over the southern hills, carried with it the fragrance of the woods beyond, and settled about the city as an incense from heaven.

Seated by an open window of her room, Nina Smedley looked out upon the soft grass spread like a rich carpet over the ground. "Why does sorrow exist in this beautiful world?" she mused; "how nature does appeal, with her beauty, to gladden our hearts; and yet, as Bryant says, 'She speaks a various language'; how true that only for our gladder hours it has 'a smile and eloquence of beauty.'"

In the distance she heard the sweet voices of children at play, and contrasted their glad little hearts with her own—so full of sorrow—a sorrow the world should never know.

"Darlings," she thought, "how little they know of unhappiness, beyond a broken doll or a bruised toe. I wonder how many of those little girls are to be as wretched as I am, when they grow up."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Much had happened since the day oil had advanced to one dollar and fifty cents. Weatherbee was so pleased with the improvement in his son's conduct, which he believed to be the result of Nina's influence, and made every effort to bring about their marriage.

He knew that delays were dangerous, especially when an important thing was to be accomplished, and so allowed nothing to stand between himself and his purpose.

Smedley was like a hypnotic subject when he came under the influence of this master of "human animals," and to Nina he became the medium through which the master's will was carried out; and not until the wedding day was set did he relinquish his efforts to make her the wife of his son.

Through love for Grace, Nina had conceded many points in George's favor. She was kept under the constant pressure of their persuasions, of which her father's was the greatest, and George continued to impose his love upon her with such ardor that all combined was more than she could resist or withstand.

Then when her father pleaded the friendship which had increased his wealth tenfold she yielded, and became the betrothed of a man toward whom her heart would ever remain dead and cold.

The wedding was to take place early in May, and when the day arrived poor Nina became filled with the realization of what it meant. Her heart felt

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

imprisoned behind walls through which its cries for freedom could never be heard.

"Married to-night to George Weatherbee," she thought, as she watched the group of children passing. "Oh, it cannot be! I don't love him—he knows it, too—Oh, must it be?"

She found her answer in the beautiful array of wedding clothes spread about her room. The spotless dress of white satin with foamy lace in profusion, the beautiful waxen wreath of orange-blossoms, which looked self-poised upon the veil clinging in filmy folds over the pillar of the bed. The dainty shoes of white satin, threaded with narrow ribbon, and silk hose to match—yes, it was true, she would be married to-night.

"Oh, why is it to be?" This time she asked aloud, as if expecting some consoling voice from out the solitude of her heart to answer, "No, it is not to be, you did but dream."

How was life to go when married to a man in whose eyes and mouth she read the deception which lurked within? "He love me?—never! How cleverly have they duped my poor, emotional and sentimental father, whose every thought of me or my happiness has been narrowed to the securing of a good home. Home!—how much that dear old Saxon word conveys."

A good home—what home is good without pure, unselfish and untiring love, where man and wife, with heart and soul fused together, live happily in the

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

sunshine of each other's affection. Where his courage is met with her caution, his confidence with her trust, his strength with her weakness, his doubts with her faith.

Down in the depths of her heart she knew with keen womanly instinct what a mockery this man was to all things manly; for in his face, his acts, his words, she read a character whose love of women was unholy, impure and selfish.

There was a time when she believed he possessed a spark of manhood; but as time passed, and she saw more of him, he unconsciously betrayed the snake within him.

"He has been the mouthpiece of his sister, the girl I believed to be my best and only friend. Oh! that I could die and be with my mother!"

When the overwhelming sense of despair had passed, and the kaleidoscope of weird fancy had assumed outlines of stern reality, an inward something told her to refrain from brooding over what might prove to be imaginary wrongs, and if this had to be, to make the best of it by fostering the bright, and rejecting the gloomy side.

"I will not allow myself to think so hardly of him," she concluded, wiping the tears from her eyes; "perhaps it is my own hateful looks I see reflected in him; I don't love him though, but if I *have* to be his wife no act of mine will ever be the cause of any unhappiness between us."

Mechanically she rose and stood beside the bed.

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

The array of beautiful garments in which she was to be married that night seemed to plead for him, the occasion of their existence.

"How lovely you will look! you must love him, for he will you, when he sees you to-night." Taking up a fold of lace, she fumbled it carelessly between her fingers. Thus she sat meditating.

"How delighted I used to be when a stray piece of lace came into my hands with which I could adorn my doll—my dear old dolly, how I did love her!"

The recollection of the doll, called up by remembering how she used to tack every odd bit of lace to its clothing, brought her back to the days of her childhood, and once again she was beside her mother, seated by a low table, telling her stories of good and bad little girls.

Once again, she saw the little pink sun-bonnet and checked dress, and heard the clatter of two little feet in heavy shoes, running over the rough board porch in front of a long, low, unpainted, oil country dwelling where happiness and love reigned supreme, free from the molestation and petty jealousy of estates and fickle society.

"Better my father had never made a dollar, than live like this," she thought; "but perhaps, it was to be. The day Johnny's father was burned to death I dropped my poor old doll upon a stone and cracked its poor head and face, but the disfigurement didn't lessen my love a bit. How I did cry that day—and Johnny, too. Oh! can it be the same one? I know

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

it is, that same earnest face is there. How big he is. Why didn't he write to me again, I wonder? Ah! had I been like most girls I would have fooled my father and written to him in secret—but maybe he didn't love me; why should he—he only saw me twice—and if he had loved me, nothing could have silenced him so long.

"I wonder what he is doing now? Perhaps married to a girl who does not love him, but who married him as too many do, just for a home. What a world, what a world! trouble, trouble, trouble! Young and old, great and small, rich and poor, all—all have their trouble, and each one not seeing the others', think his the greatest. So if it is trouble anyway, I will make the best of my lot, be it what it may, and compel myself to be happy with the man whom inscrutable circumstances has ordained to be my husband. Then, if he fails to do his duty, I will take it as the divine will of God, and for a single purpose, to leave him. Yes, I will leave him, and seek refuge in a convent behind whose walls there is much to comfort the broken heart of a woman."

A step outside which she recognized broke the spell of musing, and rising, she opened wide the door and stood face to face with her father.

"This is where you are," he said, stepping aside, "I have been looking all over for you; what is the matter, Nina, you look sad, have you been weeping?"

"No," she said truthfully, "I am not sad. I am going to be happy. Just as long as I have my dear

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

old daddy, I will be happy.” He caught her in his arms and kissed her.

“I feel sad, little girl,” he said, choking a sob; “something says I have done wrong in urging this, but I am nervous I guess; who wouldn’t be sad giving up such a good girl—make anybody sad, wouldn’t it, sweetheart?”

She nodded affirmatively, but did not look up.

“When I went to bed last night,” he continued, “I was unable to go to sleep. Everything imaginable came and passed through my brain, and unable to endure the solitude of the long, weary night, I arose, dressed, and stole quietly here to your room. You lay, sleeping, across the bed; it was past three o’clock, but you had not undressed. I looked at your feet projecting in their little shoes over the edge of the bed, and recalled your baby days, when your dear angel mother used to play, ‘This little pig,’ and how you would laugh and coo, and kick your chubby little feet in her lap. And I thought of a time when she held you upon one arm, and kissing your tiny feet, asked God to lay out holy paths for you to tread upon as you journeyed through life.

“With the memory of those days in mind, and the uncertainty of the future plainly in view, I stood here and wept over you, till fearing to waken you I skulked back to my room, and for the first time in years, I prayed.”

Nina saw that he was strangely moved. “How emotional he is,” she thought; “his conscience is

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

reproving him, but never again shall he know from me what my feelings are. I have resolved to make the best of it, and if the worst comes to the worst, no one can blame me"; and looking up into his face, she kissed him.

"Cheer up, you darling old daddy, why are you so glum when I am happy? George and I are going to be happy, and I will be near you all the time, so don't feel so downhearted; you are not going to lose me, and, and—if anything *should* happen"—she said this earnestly, "you can take me back, can't you?"

"If in time, I should see I had made a mistake in marrying you to this man, and he should ever, in any way, make your life unhappy, I would not only take you back, but I would——"

"Don't say it, you are emotional now, he won't make me unhappy."

"I hope not, for his own good," Mr. Smedley curtly replied. "It seems it is to be, although I have not felt my conscience exactly free in the matter, but so long as you have become reconciled, it seems a great weight has been lifted from my mind."

"I am resigned to your will, dear papa, and while I do not feel toward George as I should feel toward the man I am going to marry, I am submitting to your judgment; and there is one thing I must tell you, for to-night a gulf will come between us which will ever separate us as father and child, and in leaving you, I want to go with the assurance at least that I have always tried to be an obedient daughter, and

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

intentionally I would not deceive you, but there are impulses of life over which we have no control.

"I can no more help loving Mr. Payne than I can help breathing the breath of life. I know not why, but he is coupled in my mind with the little boy I played with when a child. Don't worry, he shall never know it, and no doubt he is not, as you say, the kind of a man I should marry; but I wanted to confess it to you that I might be able to leave with a clear conscience."

"Indeed, Nina," he returned, "you did not deceive me in this, for I knew how you felt toward the fellow; your love for him was not hard to see; time, however, will wean you from it, for love which flashes into existence is not love, but sentiment."

"And what is love but sentiment?" she returned; and for awhile they stood in silence. The stopping of a carriage in front attracted them to the window, and looking out they beheld their friend Mr. Graham, alighting upon the curb.

"The dear old 'Lion,'" Nina exclaimed, throwing back the curtains and waving a welcome to him. "Hello there," she called, "we'll be down in a minute, go right in."

He raised his inevitable silk hat toward her, smiling his appreciation of her frank and hearty reception.

"Well, Mr. Graham, glad to see you," Smedley said, extending his hand as the two men met in the hall. "We've heard all kinds of stories about you since you went to Philadelphia, but judging from your appear-

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

ance there was nothing in them. Are you quite well again?"

"Never felt better in my life—but I want to see Nina."

"Oh, she'll be down in a minute, had to fix her hair a little, you know; but tell me, you are not suffering from cancer of the stomach, are you?"

Mr. Graham laughed. "Was that one of the stories?" he asked.

"Yes, they had you dead, dying, and dead a dozen times."

"Just so; but I tell you, Smedley, it does beat the devil how those doctors do differ in their opinions. They talk about their schools and their systems, but it's my opinion of doctors that they do considerable guessing."

"Well, what was the matter, anyway?"

"I will tell you what the different doctors said, and let you draw your own conclusions. The first of the trouble began with pains in my side and an inclination toward nausea. I went to a doctor, relating as best I could my symptoms, and as I spoke he looked wise, stroking his beard in a knowing way, and when my 'tale of woe' was ended, he smiled and nodded as if my case was very clear.

"Rheumatism," he said, and wrote me a prescription. I took the stuff according to Hoyle, but got no relief, whereupon I became anxious and called upon Dr. No. 2; and after hearing my story, he looked wise and pronounced it gastritis.

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

"Under his treatment I got no better, and in talking to Jim Pratt, he said he had had the very same thing and was cured by an osteopath; so I went to one, and after looking me over he looked very wise and said, 'The ligaments of your stomach have got crossed, and I will have to knead your stomach.'

"'You don't need it half as bad as I do,' I said; 'but start your game, whatever it is, before this damn pain kills me.' Well, to make a long story short, he rubbed and pinched me till I was sore as a boil, my pain grew worse, and I decided to try homeopathy.

"Accordingly I presented myself to a disciple of Hahneman, and after a long talk about symptoms he gave me a small vial filled with pills about the size of mustard seeds, which I took, but without relief. The pain persisted, and I tell you, Smedley, it was the most devilish, crampy pain I ever had in my life.

"Finally I became frightened, and went to Philadelphia to consult a stomach specialist. I found one, and lined up to take my turn with the anxiously waiting throng. At last my turn came, and I found myself before the man of renown.

"He went at me rough shod, and had me eat some stuff procured from a back cupboard, 'test meal' he called it, then in a few minutes he poked a garden hose into my stomach, pumped it out and made some sort of scientific test. 'Gracious!' he exclaimed, 'no acid!'

"'What does no acid mean?' I asked.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"He shook his head sorrowfully, 'My friend,' he said, 'you are suffering from incipient cancer of the stomach.'

"I paid him one hundred dollars for this most pleasing advice, and left his sanctum feeling mighty blue. I tried to console myself by reflecting on the inevitable end of man; but I wanted relief, so it occurred to me to take a chance on surgery, as I understood some fellow in Switzerland had had his stomach removed and was doing well on goat's milk; so after much deliberating, I called upon a distinguished surgeon, Deaver,\* I believe, was his name.

"He went after me as if earnestness was the sole law of cure. He put me on trial, so to speak, gathered what evidence he could from my family and personal history, considered my mode of living, habits and environments. This done, he began an examining process which appealed to me as most thorough. Placing a hand over the spot of pain, and instructing me to cough, I felt something slip beneath his fingers, and as if touched by the magic wand of a fairy, my pain immediately ceased.

"'How do you feel now?' he asked, giving his eye a satisfactory wink.

"'Fine,' I answered. 'What was it?'

"'An omental hernia of very small caliber,' he replied.

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\*This little reference is made to my esteemed friend, John. B. Deaver, whose work in surgery is a credit to the American profession.—A U T H O R .

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

"I admitted that whatever it was, it had a depressing effect upon my mental apparatus, but he fixed me up right, and here I am. When I told him what the other doctors had said he raised his hand in warning, and reminded me that 'To err is human, to forgive divine.'

"Ah, here is my girl," he said, as Nina appeared on the stairs. She ran forward and greeted him kindly. "So glad to see you, Mr. Graham; we heard you had gone to Philadelphia on account of ill health; are you quite well now?"

"Quite well, indeed, never felt better in my life—so you are to be Mrs. George Weatherbee! isn't this a bit of a surprise?"

"How?" she asked.

"Well, I never heard the least inkling of it till I received your invitation."

"You know what Riley says," she returned with a laugh.

"No, I don't recall—what *does* he say?"

Counting the words upon her finger tips from hand to hand, she began:

"Love is as curious a little thing,  
As a humming bird upon the wing,  
And just as likely to poke his nose  
Right where folks would least suppose;  
And live and thrive at your expense,  
At least that's been *my* experience."

"He certainly had the thing sized up about right," Mr. Graham replied quickly, "but I could never

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

imagine such a combination; but after all, love is only a matter of taste, and there's no accounting for tastes."

"Whether you mean to flatter George or myself, I do not know, but at Christmas you said, 'The man who would get these,' and she held out her hands, 'ought to be a good one,' didn't you?"

"Yes, and I say it again, but I see you are drawing me into deep water—you know I didn't use to like George."

"But you will now, Mr. Graham, won't you?"

"Yes, I will," he said, after a moment's hesitation; "if George Weatherbee was able to win your love, I must confess him a greater man than I thought him to be."

At this she winced, but inwardly, for she knew how impossible it would be to deceive a man whose sense of character reading was so keen. So, absorbed in thought, she became silent, and Mr. Graham, although staring at the floor, was intuitively conscious of what was passing through her mind.

"Is it not possible you have misjudged George?" she finally asked.

"Certainly, certainly, all I hope is that he will appreciate my little girl"—he said this with feeling.

Fearing that he might be drawn into the conversation, Mr. Smedley took up Graham's valise and started for the stair. "Come, Graham," he said, "you and Nina can talk to-night, come to your room, for I am sure a little rest will do you good."

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

He readily consented and followed his host up the stairs. Nina watched the two men till they reached the landing, then running to the banister post she called, "Oh, Mr. Graham, did papa tell you he was ill?"

"Why no, is he?"

"He has the grippe," she said, pointing to the one her father was carrying, "he must have gotten it from you."

"You rascal," he said, shaking a finger at her. "Don't worry, I'll see that he gets over it all right."

Opening the door of his guest's room and placing the portmanteau upon the floor Mr. Smedley turned to go, but was restrained by his friend. "Don't be in a hurry, Smedley," he said, closing the door, "I have been doing a great deal of thinking since receiving your invitation to Nina's wedding, and you know I have to blow off when my thinking pressure reaches a certain height.

"Be frank with me, Smedley; friends such as we have been should not look askance at each other; tell me, how in hell did this ever come about? When I was here Christmas nothing was plainer to me than Nina's dislike for George, and here in the space of a few months I find them upon the verge of their wedding."

"When it comes to love affairs," Mr. Smedley returned, "we must not be surprised at anything; in love and war the unexpected always happens."

"That is true too," Mr. Graham said, "but unless

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

you have thoroughly weighed every step of this procedure, my advice as a friend is to put a stop to it right now. I tell you, Smedley, money may and does make customs and defines classes, by setting up standards which are as artificial as the paint used to imitate the cheek of the peasant girl, but it can never buy brains or manhood.

"I have no fight with money, have a little myself and like it, too, but thank God I am not tied to a frivolous woman, who, with my money, could marry a daughter of mine to some one who by comparative wealth would be considered her equal.

"This vain 'class' business, Smedley, has gotten a hold on you, and to my mind is responsible for this wedding. Out with it, Smedley, isn't that it?—Out with it now, don't I speak the truth?"

"Would you have me give her to some fellow on a salary of fifty or sixty dollars a month? Graham, I don't like this talk and really wasn't expecting it from you."

"Like it or not," he returned, going to his side and slapping him upon the shoulder, "I am talking for the little girl's happiness; you can't fool me, I know human nature too well; that girl never did, and never will love that man.

"You can't imagine, Smedley, how it struck into my heart to see her efforts toward inducing a mechanical or artificial love for him. Love, to such natures as hers, is an inspiration.

"Yes, a thousand times better marry her to a man

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

of small salary, and one capable of appreciating her womanly instincts. Some fellow with brains and ambition—that's the class to which she belongs, Smedley, and time will convince you that I am right.

"Do you suppose that polished old thief of a Weatherbee, would allow his son to look at your girl if you had not been successful in your ventures?—not much.

"You see, Smedley," he continued, "fortunes made in oil are fortunes peculiar in themselves; all classes have felt the magic touch. Take your own case, for instance; you were quite an ordinary man until you drilled your first well; suppose you had drilled a dry hole, can you imagine with what reluctance you would have tried again?

"And suppose you had, and your efforts were rewarded with another dry hole, as you know was the fate of many, would you not be the same Smedley, and Nina the same sweet child she has always been?"

"There is no question about that, Graham, but I fail to see the point."

"My point is this: if you could look upon young Weatherbee as a suitable companion for your daughter in other ways besides finance, the matter of class would cut no figure; but you cannot deny to me that it is wealth and caste to which you are looking, more than real worth.

"What's this country coming to, anyway? We boast of our liberty, we pride ourselves on American freedom, we teach our children to look with compassion upon the subjects of a monarchy, but give

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

us mammon, and the first thing we do is to imitate the nobility which was disrupted centuries ago by the spilling of our forefathers' blood upon Bunker Hill.

"See some of the disgusting things that caste and money are dictating to some of our American girls, girls reared in the lap of luxury begotten by American wealth, girls whose ancestry we point to with pride; but because of money, they throw themselves at the feet of some foreign fop, and regardless of specific taint and brittle bones, become wedded to an empty title, the name of which, thank God, never sounded American, and their reward is frequently a ruined castle.

"Now, Smedley, I am done; I have 'blowed off' good, and if my 'blowing' has hurt you, remember, it was from my heart—not my mouth, that I spoke."

The truth of Graham's words sank deeply into Smedley's heart, for since the day he had insisted upon the marriage of his daughter to George he had felt ill at ease, and tried to relieve his conscience by observing the ill success of others, who, marrying for love, found themselves tied to an incompatible nature.

Now all was clear, for that he had looked more to money and social standing than principle he could not deny, but the irrevocable plunge had been taken, and retreat was next to impossible.

For some time he stood with his back to the door, while Mr. Graham seated himself upon the bed and toyed meditatively with his watch chain.

## A RELUCTANT MARRIAGE

"Well," he finally said, opening the door to go,  
"'All's well that ends well.' Your words have given  
me the 'creeps,' Graham, but if I have acted unwisely,  
time alone will tell. Take a rest now, and be in a  
jolly mood when you come down."

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FAMOUS "646"

THE morning following Nina's wedding Smedley, from a sleepless night and remorseful conscience, felt nervous and depressed.

When the ceremony was over, and the few invited guests had taken their departure, and the express was bearing the bride and groom away, Smedley, after seeing his friend Graham to bed, crept back to the library, and closed the door. The room was cold. A heavy damp fog had risen from the river and enveloped the city. Lighting the fire in the grate, he sank into a chair before the warming blaze.

Through the mist before his eyes he looked disconsolately into the fire.

As Graham was about to retire, he caught the sound of muffled sobs coming from below. He stepped out into the hall and listened, peering down into the dark below.

"Poor devil," he thought. "It's hell anyway," and returning to his room he dressed, and noiselessly crept down stairs.

At the door of the library he paused and listened. "Poor devil," he repeated. Softly he opened the door, and as softly closed it when he stepped inside. In the full glare of the fire Smedley sat, supporting



*The famous "646."*

*From an old photograph. Kindness of H. C. Zeigler, Muncie, Ind.*



his head with one hand, which in turn rested upon the arm of the chair. Graham stepped cautiously to his side.

"What is emotion?" he asked himself, looking compassionately upon the grief-stricken man before him. "A man with too much is cursed in this world, and one without it only exists, for nothing then appeals to the cold selfishness within. A little is a virtue, and to it belongs the poet's success, and the lover's happiness. Too much distorts the nervous system, and judgment is warped by pseudo sympathies."

"Graham was right," Smedley muttered audibly.

"I think he was wrong," Graham returned, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Come, man, get some smokes, and let us try our hand at checkers or something; this is no way to be going on."

The suddenness of Graham's voice, together with the feeling that he was alone, sent a creepy chill through Smedley. "When did you come in?" he asked, grasping the hand which pressed sympathetically upon his shoulder.

"Never mind when, it's enough that I'm in. I feel sorry for you, my dear man, but you must fight down these fits of emotion. Come now, where are the cigars?"

"You don't understand, Graham, *you* never had a child; it would take a parent to appreciate my emotion, as you call it."

"No, I never had a child, that's true," Graham returned quickly; "but see here, you must cut this

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

out; cheer up, I say, and get the smokes, it will soon be daylight." Smedley obeyed mechanically.

"It's a wonder to me," Graham said, biting the end of his cigar, "that your sentimental inclinations haven't led you to hunt up and tie to some lone widow; for emotional tendencies in a man your age," here he paused to light his cigar, "are the tentacles of ensnarement.

"You would be a cinch for some of those fair belles who, when not posing in nudation for some aspiring artist, are warbling sweet words into the ear of some emotional ass. Good thing, old man, you don't live in New York. Ha! ha! that sobers you, doesn't it?"

Smedley laughed, and striking a match handed it to him for an answer.

"Why don't you smoke? I'm not going to furnish cigars, if you're going to preach."

"All right then, thanks, light up yourself," Graham replied.

"Not now."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I have been troubled a little with my heart of late; nothing serious, but Dr. Davis said it would be best to abstain for awhile."

"Fine doctor, I wish I had gone to him when my 'mental hernia' first came on—gosh! that was an experience."

"Such men as Dr. Davis are hard to find," Smedley continued; "honest, faithful and truly noble, and his

## THE FAMOUS "646"

heart is in his profession—the poor of Oil City can bear testimony to that. Nina is so fond of him."

"The trouble with the doctor, Smedley, is that he is too big a man for his surroundings. He is a thinker. A man who cannot think, and think logically, has no more business in the medical profession than a mule would have in a stylish livery stable."

"Deaver was the only thinker I struck, I can tell 'em. The 'wise' look is a boogaboo with me."

"Sometimes," Smedley continued, "I have queer sensations in the region of my heart, but he says if I avoid unusual exertion and excitement they won't amount to anything. One of the valves of my heart, he explained, was defective, and when the blood was pumped into the 'arterial tree,' as he called it, a portion of it leaked back. I wonder how such fine conclusions can be drawn?"

"Why, by thinking, and thinking logically, as I have said. Any system of education that hangs on a dogma, is a farce of the first water. Think of the damned nonsense of me taking mustard seed pills, which according to Hahneman's dogma, would produce pain and nausea in health, and that disease being cured by similars, my pain would have to go. Heavens, what absurdity!"

"The other fellows, of the old school, without a dogma, and too lazy to think, take on the 'wise look.' But the man who asks himself, 'Why this pain?' and sets about to find the cause, is the one and only great physician."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Why don't you mention the osteopaths in your criticism? How about their dogma of displaced bones and tissues?"

"Great Scott, Smedley, don't talk osteopathy to me! Of all the rank fakes, that's the limit. Barnum's statement, 'The American people love to be humbugged' is well exemplified by it; it is a burlesque of the first water, and should not in any way be associated with systems, which in themselves are good, but are made ridiculous by a lot of lazy whelps who never had an original idea in their lives."

"I wonder where Nina is now?" Smedley broke in abruptly.

"You must be losing your memory," Graham said, laughing outright. "Don't you remember she is on her wedding trip? she's on her way to New York."

"Remember? Huh!"

Thus they sat and whiled away the few hours of darkness, Graham talking on any subject which might suggest itself, and constantly deterring his friend from thinking of the absent girl.

The Exchange opened that day with the usual monotony of "No change in the market." Stubbornly the indicator on the wall rested at the one-fifty mark. Buyers of certificate oil were becoming restless. "What's keeping it from going up?" was a question which went the rounds of the uneasy small dealers and "margin holders."

"What do you think of it?" Smedley asked his friend, who was looked upon as a sort of wizard

## THE FAMOUS "646"

when it came to prophesying events in the oil market.

"When I 'bucked the tiger,'" Graham returned, "my motto was to sell when I had a chance to double my money; for this game, by virtue of its own nothingness, cannot last. Another thing, Smedley, you are not acting in a sane way. You are placing too much confidence in the man who has everything you own covered by mortgage. I wouldn't trust Bill Weatherbee as far as I could throw a bull by the tail. Take my advice and sell now, and when you have sold, clear up every mortgage, and content yourself in the future with substantially safe investments."

That afternoon Mr. Smedley met Weatherbee, who greeted him with, "Well, brother Smedley, suppose the 'kids' are nearing New York by this time?"

"Yes, Nina said she would wire me when they arrived—by the way, what do you think keeps the market from advancing?"

"That's easy," Weatherbee returned with an air of confidence, "the production is holding up fairly well; one-fifty is balancing the output fairly well. You're not getting panicy, I hope."

"Oh no, but Graham advises me to clear up, and I believe I will."

"Damn that old fossil," thought Weatherbee, "why don't he keep his nose out of other peoples' business?" aloud he said:

"Well, Smedley, you know what you want to do,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

but mine will stay till the two-dollar mark is reached. There'll be a decline in the production by another month, and when she starts again it may not stop short of the price of palmy days, when six and seven dollars per barrel was cheerfully paid. So just hang on for awhile."

Weatherbee, while sanguine in his advice, was unable to explain satisfactorily to himself the stagnation of the market. No more wells had been reported in, and no more territory meant, in the natural law of supply and demand, an advancing market.

There was only one man who could explain the situation—but would he? The question perplexed him. If there was only some way by which he could get next to Joseph Seep, the Standard's purchasing agent; but there wasn't, he knew Seep too well, and besides, Seep knew him. No, he must ferret it out some way himself, so accordingly, like a cat, he watched and waited.

Fragments of conversation picked up here and there he put together, till several well-founded clues were formulated in his mind. He gleaned that Morck and Dimick were drilling a "wild cat" near the border of Warren and Forest Counties, miles from all previous developments, and from this he reasoned that the Standard was waiting the result of the bold dash, in fear of the possibility of a new field being opened. There could be no mistake in his conclusions, he must investigate the matter for himself.

## THE FAMOUS "646"

The well, so rumor had it, was a mystery,\* and no one aside from the two owners and their crowd were allowed to pass a rope line which encircled the rig at a radius of several hundred feet. All this came to him brokenly, but putting this and that together, he set out one day for Warren County, determined to play the "scout."

Knowing the weakness of humanity when it came to a matter of dollars and cents, he took several hundred dollars with him, for that he could bribe one of the guards, he was confident.

The sun had settled behind the western hills when he stepped from the train at Clarandon, a small lumbering town some six or eight miles from the mysterious well.

At a small store, operated by a lumber company, he purchased the outfit in which he was to play the part of scout, and then set out over the hill through unbroken forests of hemlock and red cherry, in the direction of the ridge known as "Cherry Grove," and where the "mystery" was being drilled.

The outfit which he carried wrapped in heavy paper, was complete. Soft slouch hat, blue flannel shirt, jean pants, rubber coat and boots.

Pausing now and then to rest, it was long after midnight before the welcome "chug-chug" of the

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\*The character of a well drilled in an undeveloped location was frequently kept a secret by the owner in order to secure surrounding territory. The well would be roped in, and guards placed to keep all inquirers outside the line. Such wells were spoken of as "A mystery."—AUTHOR.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

engine greeted his ears. Through the trees he saw the shimmer of a hundred or more derrick lamps describing a circle, from the center of which rose white clouds of steam.

Beneath the flickering rays he saw the sentries move back and forth over a short beat, but their numbers did not disturb him.

Retracing his steps a few paces, he circled around till he was immediately back of the derrick; for he must get by that rope some way, and once inside, and away from the guard line, he could creep unseen under the derrick floor, procure a specimen of the sand from the "dump-box" and judge of its character, whether good or bad, by a subsequent examination.

In the shadow of a large tree, he changed his clothing for the suit procured at the lumbering store.

Putting the slouch hat tightly over his head, and buttoning the rubber coat snugly around him, he crept cautiously toward the line.

Reaching a point a few paces from the guard-line, he saw the impossibility of passing unobserved beyond the rope; so he drew from his pocket a roll of bills, and keeping his hand clenched on the money, he resumed his way until he reached a large tree just outside the line.

To and fro a guard passed over his beat; presently Weatherbee called quietly to him, "Hey there!"

The guard stopped, startled by the suddenness of the call. "Who is it?" he asked.

"Keep still," Weatherbee said. "I have impor-

## THE FAMOUS "646"

tant news," he went on; "tell me, is your name Dimick?"

To be taken for a man of wealth was pleasing to the fellow, and momentarily he forgot the responsibility which rested on his shoulders.

"No," he quickly returned, "my name is Smith."

"Oh, you're Smith, one of the guards?"

"Yes, that's me, what do you want here?" he demanded quickly, recalling his duty.

"Make your beat," Weatherbee instructed, with an authentic wave of the clenched hand, "then come back, I've important news for you."

The fellow obeyed mechanically. Returning, he repeated the question, "What do you want here?"

"Smith," Weatherbee began, "for reasons I am unable to explain, I am entitled to go over to the rig, but I do not wish to be seen by parties whom I know are prowling around here."

"I want you to take this lamp down and put it out; then I will creep in under the rope; tell the other guards you need more oil to refill the lamp—do you catch on?"

"I catch on all right, stranger, but my instructions are to let no one pass the rope."

"That's all right, my dear man," Weatherbee continued, "so far as outsiders are concerned, but I am one of the gang who has something to say here. Take this," he continued abruptly, "and if I don't prove to you that I am entitled to admission, every cent of it is yours."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

The fellow thrust his hand out into the light, and eyed the money.

"Take a skip over your beat," Weatherbee said in a whisper, pushing him gently away from the tree.

As the fellow came back, he stopped directly under the light and took a quick glance at the roll of bills in his hand.

"How much is here?" he asked, stepping once more into the shadow.

"Two hundred and fifty dollars, and to-morrow, when you know whom I am, just hand me back one hundred and fifty, and keep the other hundred for your loyalty to my interest; now hurry, Smith, and get the light out."

Giving the fat roll of bills another covetous glance, the fellow thrust the money into his pocket and hurried down the beat to meet the opposing guard.

"Any oil down the line?" he asked as the two met; "my middle lamp is flickering."

"Guess so, send it down," was the reply.

Returning to the tree, he hooked the lamp down with a forked stick, and smothered the flames. This done, he poured the oil upon the ground, and hurried with the empty lamp down the line.

So soon as the light was extinguished, Weatherbee lost no time in crawling under the rope, and was soon within the timber and underbrush surrounding the rig. Approaching the derrick, he straightened out full length upon the ground, stealthfully worming his way through mud and poragy sand-pumpings,

## THE FAMOUS "646"

till he found himself immediately beneath the bull-wheels.

Fearing the possibility of a premature flow of oil or gas, the drillers had removed all lights from the derrick, and the forge to a place near the boiler. A group of men were in the derrick, and moved about in the darkness, taking turns at placing their hand upon the set screw of the clamps.

The whole affair was truly a mystery. Patiently and noiselessly Weatherbee worked his way along, unmindful of mud and water, till he reached the "dump-box" under the derrick floor, and taking a tin can from the pocket of his rubber coat, he removed the cover and anxiously awaited the run of the next bailer.

Eagerly he waited the screw to be run. At length he heard the bull-wheel-post creak and strain, and the bull-rope snap in place as it left the "dog," and as the cable slapped upon the girts of the derrick he heard the clamps unloosen, and the pitman fall heavily, butting down upon the brace of the Sampson post where it was keyed into the oaken main-sill.

The sand-pulley gave out a groan, and the click of the dart against the seat, as the long zinc bailer was snatched from the floor, told him he had not much longer to wait. Hum, hum, went the sand-reel, the line snapping and jerking each time the spool at the ends of the shaft was struck.

The vibration of the structure, as the reel whirrs around, suddenly stops as it is pushed against the

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

back-brake. He hears the lever pulled forward, and the heavy boot of the driller planted upon it to hold it down. Friction pulley and band-wheel meet, and the engine in response to the telegraph cord leaps into new life—the bailer is on its way up.

Again he hears the crisp and cringe of the back-brake, warning him to make ready. Splash! down comes the dart into the box, and as the sand runs out he fills his can, replaces the cover over the precious specimen and retraces his way, and once again in the thicket he rises to his feet, and hurries out past the tree, just before the guard hangs up the lamp again.

Finding his clothes, he loses no time in throwing off the rough suit and wiping the mud from his hands and face with the ferns growing in profusion around the woods; he dons his clothes, and after hiding the muddy ones, strikes out over the hill toward Sheffield, in hopes of catching an early train home.

It was nearly noon when he reached the city; he would lose no time in analyzing his specimen, so upon reaching his residence he emptied the contents of the tin can into a vessel containing hot water, and a film of oil soon appeared upon the surface.

Washing the sand, he examined it upon the palm of his hand and found it beautiful, white and glassy.

“If this is to be a new pool,” he mused, “it will be an unusual one, for no such oil-bearing-sand as this has ever been struck before. I’ll take no chances now.” Making a change of linen he hurried up town to the exchange.

## THE FAMOUS "646"

It had been an exciting day; a great many of the "tender-foot" class had bought heavily on margin. Weatherbee called his broker to one side and instructed him to quietly clear up his holdings at once, and in the course of a half hour he took his certificate to the office of Joseph Seep where it was exchanged for a handsome New York draft.

It was the eighteenth day of May, and that night when the frenzied crowd of speculators went to their beds not one dreamed of the terrible calamity that was to strike the oil market the next day; and many who retired that night worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, were beggared when they lay down the next.

The morning of the nineteenth was ushered in with a bright sunrise. Fog and mist which lay heavily within the river valley soon disappeared beneath the warming rays of the spring sun. At nine o'clock the exchange opened, and buyers and speculators filed in as they had been wont to do for months. The pointer, still unchanged, stood at one dollar and fifty cents. Several thousand barrels of certificates oil were bought, few were sold.

Smedley came in about ten o'clock, and seated himself in front of the indicator. Not a shadow of the ruin about to befall him crossed his mind.

At eleven o'clock Joseph Seep received a cipher, telling him the "Wild-cat" that Morck and Dimick were drilling on lot 646, Warren County, was in, and flowing at the rate of nearly three thousand barrels.

The panic which struck the exchange as the price

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

of certificates dropped from one dollar and fifty cents, to fifty cents, was terrible. It was a panic the equal of which had never been experienced.

Certificate holders were wiped out in a twinkle, their losses reaching far into the millions. Crowds gathered around the exchange; men rushed hatless into the street, with despair written upon their faces, while rumors of suicide were afloat, and other reports had it that certain ones had become hopelessly insane. They damned the Standard, the brokers, the exchange—in fact, everything connected with the word “oil.”

Weatherbee was seated in his office over the exchange, and strangely, too, was looking over the mortgages he held against the various properties of his dupe, Smedley. Hearing the first outcry upon the street, he replaced the papers in the safe and hurried down stairs. The crowd was surging to and fro, yelling and swearing; even dogs caught the spell, and barked fiercely.

“What could it mean?” he thought. The possibility of an upward jump in the market occurred to him, and he hurried into the exchange. He glanced quickly at the indicator; relentlessly, it pointed to fifty cents. “Now Smedley,” he thought, “all yours is mine,” and he laughed under his breath.

The crowd without, by this time, had become like mad. “Blow up the damned exchange. To hell with the Standard,” were words which rose high above the din.

Weatherbee remained cool; what cared he for the

## THE FAMOUS "646"

slump? He had sold in the nick of time; besides, all of Smedley's property belonged to him. "I must find him," he thought, "and appear deeply grieved; there's no need for haste."

Turning toward the "Bull-pen," around which excitement was greatest, he was about to force his way out, when the crowd parted and several of the men carried out the limp form of an unconscious man.

The head fell back over the arm tenderly supporting the neck and shoulders; the hair fell back from the high forehead, which was white and death-like. The face was ashy, the lips blue.

For an instant Weatherbee stood mute, but as the group passed him and he recognized their burden to be Smedley, he began to give instructions.

"Back here, men, back here," he commanded, leading the way to a room. "Get a doctor, quick!" he called.

As they laid him upon a couch Weatherbee tore open his collar and neck-band, then looking into the face of the man he had betrayed, cried out, "My God! gentlemen, he is dead!—where is the doctor?"

In a few minutes a physician arrived, and after placing his ear to the chest of the man, he raised his finger for silence, and listened carefully for a few minutes.

"Dead!" the word fell with a sound of emotion. "Poor Smedley is gone," he continued, straightening up, "the shock killed him. This was too much for him."

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

**T**HE disappointment which came to me when I learned of Nina's marriage!

Ah! how bitter it was! The girl whose influence I felt had fired my ambition, was the wife of another.

My first impulse was to take to drink. Men who had been more successful in life than I had found much comfort in their glass—why not I? Why nurse ambitious desires and intellectual cravings, when there was no shrine before which I could lay the trophies of successful venture?

Hard on this came the temptation for a more reckless life. I recalled the words of Mark Twain, "Be good, and you'll be lonesome."

Sporting houses were thick in every oil town and their inmates, I understood, with scarcely an exception, had a 'story,' behind which each tried to justify her impure and degraded life.

I reasoned that if a woman, when struck with the pangs of disappointed love, could find solace in living a depraved life, why should a man shrink? I thought of many prominent men, distinguished not only by vast wealth, but public position as well, who thought nothing of frequenting such places, regarding it as a

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

legitimate pastime. But, thank God, I did not yield, although I must confess the temptation was hard to resist.

Coming into the presence of my mother that evening, I realized from her sweet smile of welcome how much I was to her.

How proud she was of her great big boy! When she came forward and kissed me, as she was wont to do each evening when I returned from the wells, I registered a vow with God that so long as he spared her to me, come what would, I would be true to her early teachings, and that my lips should never touch those of the impure; and the keeping of this vow did much toward sustaining me when, for the last time, I looked upon her face, from which the grim reaper was unable to efface the smile of her lovely character. She left her only son the influence of a saint.

That night I dreamed of my childhood, and fancy pictured me standing with a little girl by my side, peering curiously into a newly-made grave—my father's. Again I saw the good and pure face of the country minister, and again I heard his prayer.

"And we pray Thee, our heavenly Father, to bless this little boy, that he may grow up to be a comfort and a blessing to his widowed mother. Give him strength of maturer years, that he may, in a little while, be a support to her."

In the morning when I arose it seemed, as I looked out of my window into the majestic forest, which was taking on its beautiful green foliage, that my feelings

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

struck a silent partnership with the gladness of nature, and a new sense of happiness took possession of me. Happy to know I had conquered myself, happy to know I was master of myself.

That day I resumed my work with renewed vigor. I had six strings of tools, with as many crews, running full time. The oil market persistently stayed at one dollar and fifty cents, and as no big wells or new territory was being found, the out-look was promising.

Of course, with so many men to look after, my duties were various and trying. But when there were no obstacles to overcome, fishing-tools to hire, or crooked holes to straighten, I used to get much comfort and relaxation from a few hours' loafing at the Oil Well Supply store, where I did my trading.

“The Oil Well Supply” was the main “hang out” for the boys, and their daily congregating served as an education to the younger members of the contracting profession, for at these gatherings every fishing-job, stuck tools, crooked hole, and leaky casing experience was reiterated.

Boyd was probably the most constant loafer of the bunch. When free from his periodical spells of drinking, he spent his leisure time at the “Hardware,” sitting upon the counter or a nail keg, demonstrating with a piece of marline the bowline, bowline and bite, square and granny knots, bull-rope hitch, claw hitch, the great importance of the “cross” when tying the tubing-line to the crown-block, in fact, all the knots and hitches necessary in the oil well business.

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

Entering the store one afternoon I noticed an unusual excitement, and had but stepped inside when some fellow yelled, "Hello, Payne! you will have to coil up your ropes now, McKean County isn't in it any more."

"What's up?" I asked, pushing my way toward the office in the rear.

"Some lucky guy has 'em all skinned in Warren County," was the reply.

Word had come by 'phone that a gusher had been struck in Warren County, miles remote from other developments. Everybody was excited, all declaring their intention of going to Cherry Grove immediately.

The evening papers from Bradford did not reach us till late in the evening, and when they arrived the newsboys demanded twenty-five cents a copy, and wished they had possessed a larger supply.

Procuring a paper, I hurried home. My mother was always interested in whatever interested me, so I told her the state of affairs in the town since the news had come on the 'phone, then sat down to read the account to her.

The front page of the paper, from margin to margin, announced in big head lines, "THE OIL INDUSTRY RUINED." "A LAKE OF OIL UNDER WARREN COUNTY." "THE MARKET BROKEN, MANY PRODUCERS AS WELL."

Following this came the description of the panic in the oil exchange at Oil City and Bradford, when

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

with a single swoop the price fell from one-fifty to fifty cents.

It described rumors of suicides, apologizing for being unable to confirm them before going to press.

The name Smedley stood out prominently several lines below, and turning my eyes upon it, I read of his sudden death.

Unconsciously, I stopped reading, fixing my mind upon the girl whom I knew was in grief, and inwardly wished it was my privilege to go and comfort her.

Patiently my mother waited for me to resume my reading. How long I mused I do not know, but I was finally brought to my senses by her asking, "What is it, John?"

Immediately I turned to the description of the well and read it; it ran thus:

"Since the drilling of the '646' began, experienced oil-men, especially men holding Standard interests, looked askance at the daring 'wild cat,' and reasoned that if it should prove to be a producer it would open a new field and dwarf the others into insignificance.

"Like everything else, gossip about the daring venture was rife for awhile, then died out, to be resuscitated when it was reported that the well had been made a 'mystery.'

"Expert scouts, disguised as tramps, and others who succeeded in bribing the guards, found that it showed indications of oil when but a few feet in the sand.

"When the third screw in the sand was about half

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

out, a vein of gas was struck which was strong enough in pressure to blow everything out of the hole.

"The tremendous volume of gas, which for ages had been pent up in the interspaces of the rock, broke down the granular cohesion as it rushed into the newly made vent, so that with the roar and blow of the gas came a stream of white sand, falling like sleet, and covering the ground for miles around.

"Thicker and thicker came the sand; it was the first time on record to have a well drill itself in. In a short time a spray of yellowish-green oil appeared, and rapidly increased in volume, until a stream the full size of the casing was spurting into the air high above the tops of the surrounding trees."

To use the phrase of the day, "The bottom dropped out of everything in McKean County." Activities stopped short, and like wild geese, people flocked to Cherry Grove.

Leases, the wells of which were yielding from three to five barrels, were sold at junk prices, the mere price of the material in them. Many too, were disposed of for a considerable less sum. The company I had been drilling for took the seizure, becoming Cherry Grove crazy, and offered me their whole lease in payment of the money they owed me.

It had been a secret ambition of mine to some day become an oil producer, and regarding the offer as a chance to attain my desires, and notwithstanding friends advising to the contrary, I accepted the proposition, finding in my new possessions a means

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

of keeping busy, as the sudden drop of the market had shut down all developments in the McKean field.

A few days later, and being looked upon as an easy mark since I had taken the lease, another company who had paid a half million dollars for a small tract in Warren County offered me their McKean holdings of twenty-five wells, with a daily production of one hundred barrels, for my drilling outfits.

I willingly accepted the offer, and following this, another bargain presented itself. I was offered a lease of twenty wells producing seventy barrels per day for ten thousand dollars, half in cash, and the balance in five years; and as I had accumulated about fifteen thousand dollars, I bought the property upon the terms stated, and set about to make the best of my holdings. Surely I was a full fledged producer, and mighty proud of it, too. As most of the wells had been drilled by myself, I knew them from their inception, and this is no small matter to a true producer. My friend Dean was delighted with my venture; it accorded with his advice, and as he put it the day we first met after my purchase, "It beats 'wind oil' all hollow; you will win out big."

"Cherry Grove, Cherry Grove, Cherry Grove! it became a synonym with gushers of oil. Ask any one where he was going, and the answer, with scarcely an exception, would be, "Cherry Grove, of course."

It was the center of petroleum activities; other

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

wells, the "Murphy," "Mahoopany," and scores of others soon followed the "646" and swelled the daily yield to thirty thousand barrels.

Five hundred wells were "punched" down with the utmost celerity. Such reports coming daily from the scene disheartened me. I regretted having bought so many small wells; it seemed now that the richest portion of the region would shrink into insignificance.

The oil country papers predicted that Cherry Grove would flood the market with cheap oil and swamp the business in the older fields.

Enormous sums were being paid for fragments of territory in and about the new opening, and it looked as if the average operator would be crushed out of the business.

Each day added to my discouragement, until I finally concluded to pull out every well I had, and market the stuff at Garfield, another town of much room girth which the "646" had brought into existence

I explained my plans to my mother, who listened attentively until I had finished. With the money I would realize, I argued, I could buy a few strings of tools and move to where contractors were at a premium.

"Don't be in a hurry, John," she said. "You have a little of your father's impulsiveness in you; there's an end to everything in this world, and those gushers are not going to be an exception to this fixed rule; be patient."

While not liking her advice, as I was anxious to

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

rid myself of so much care and worry, yet I knew its logic could not be gainsaid.

She went on to show me how comfortably we could live, even at the present low price of oil, and asked me to consider what an immense thing I had in case oil returned to a dollar, or a dollar fifty. She reminded me, too, of the many undrilled locations upon my leases, and what they meant in case Cherry Grove exhausted itself.

"All right, mother dear," I said, giving her a big kiss, "you are the philosopher of this concern. I will wait, as the picture you have drawn is well worth keeping before me. Oh! if you should be right, we will move down on Easy street, won't we?"

Thus the summer passed and toward fall we began hearing reports that Cherry Grove was declining, as a series of dry holes had been brought in upon locations considered good and sure, and the production of the big gushers had settled down to a few dozen barrels.

From this time, emaciation of the field was progressive. Vainly the "gut" through which the oil came, and which, they reasoned, must be somewhere, was diligently searched for, and while zealous efforts to keep the field alive were made, yet the end was inevitable.

One morning in December, Cherry Grove died as suddenly as it was born. It was noticed by the workmen that the Forest Oil Company's largest gusher had stopped flowing, and within a week the contagion

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

spread like an epidemic, and with scarcely an exception every well became paralyzed and ceased to yield.

The production fell to dozens instead of thousands of barrels, and by January over three-fourths of the wells were deserted, machinery moved, and a frenzied crowd dispersed to all points of the compass, and once more the voice of the night-bird was heard from out the solitary forest.

The crisis reacted immediately upon the market, the price of oil jumping to sixty-seven cents. It was the experience which taught the producer the impressive and lasting lesson, "Be shy of gushers; when you have a production, hang on to it." When I heard of the fall of "Rome," I must confess that it was gratifying to my selfishness at least.

I hurried to tell Boyd, who had been pumping my wells on the hill. We had dubbed the boiler-house where Boyd pumped, "Boyd's boiler-parlor," and indeed, it *was* a boiler-parlor.

The inside was covered from rafter to floor with pictures of every fashion, form and size. Barnum's circus in lithograph ; elephants, lions, and tigers looked at you from the gables, and theatrical scenes, where the villain's life was saved by the heroine, who, upon her knees, pleaded for him. Glassy advertisements of soap, and prize fighters culled from the pink pages of the *Police Gazette*.

The floor was carpeted with the heavy burlaps in which my cables were shipped, and the boiler was kept

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

as black and glossy as a sable. Tallow, Jim would insist, was the only real boiler black, and from the appearance I believed he was right.

The brass trimmings of the globe valves, steam-gauge and inspirator he kept polished to a golden hue. Then there was furniture of his own design and make, upholstered with cotton-waste and burlaps.

As I came to the end of the steam-box outside the door, which on account of the weather was closed, I heard him scraping on an old violin and singing a little ditty, at the time quite popular with the boys.

Boyd would never sing if he thought any one was within hearing distance, so I put my ear to the door and heard his song through before entering.

“Ofttimes I sit and think of happy hours once spent,  
As I sat beside the jack-post on the sill, .

And watched the walking-beam as up and down it went,  
And listened to the birds sing on the hill.

“We'll hang the temper-screw upon the derrick stand,  
Lay away the cable and the drill;  
For thirty days it's taken us to put her in the sand,  
From the little hemlock derrick on the hill.”

I kicked my toes against the door as a bluff to knock the snow from my boots, and entered with the air of a man who wouldn't stop for anything till the tale of good news was told.

Boyd never would sing, as I have said, in company; but when I told him the latest from Cherry Grove, to my surprise he hopped around like a cricket,

## THE PRODUCER'S DELUSION

thrumming the strings, and singing over and over.  
“We'll hang the temper-screw,” etc.

“Oh, we are the people now,” he said, hanging the violin up, and putting his arm over my shoulder. “A fool for luck, Jack, and a ‘nigger’ for dogs every time.” He was hilarious.

Unfortunately, his hilarity precipitated another drinking bout, and hiding himself from me, he remained drunk for nearly a week.

I learned he was in Bradford, and accordingly looked for him. In an old shanty, located on what was called “Pig Island,” I found him, and he offered no resistance but meekly returned with me.

Up, up, up, slowly, but surely, the market crept. I saw a new future dawning before me, and everything seemed so bright that oftentimes I doubted my senses. But when alone, perhaps in the stillness of the night, or the solitude of a storm, my inward self would again hold me to the involuntary longings of my heart, and the question, “What's the use?” would force itself upon me; and for a time it would seem that no success could bring me happiness, when she, my first companion, belonged to another.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A SAD VOYAGE

**N**INA'S sea voyage was a sad and lonely one. Never before had she ventured so far from home without her father with her.

She was not unmindful of the great difference between the two men—the men between whom she was now to divide her affections.

Upon other occasions, when traveling in company with her father, she recalled how no opportunity passed that he did not administer to her most trifling needs, and in her mind contrasted this with the cold selfishness of her husband, who seemed totally indifferent and careless of the little attentions which any woman might expect.

But, since circumstances had allotted to her a husband whose tastes were incompatible with her own, she found herself striving hard to readjust characteristics which, if retained, would only serve to widen the gulf between them.

Could he have made similar concessions, no doubt but their lives would have been drawn together, and ultimately fused into a happy companionship.

Their wedding trip had been planned by Grace, who argued that so long as she could not accompany them, it would be no more than fair to be permitted to map out the honeymoon.

## A SAD VOYAGE

Accordingly, it was decided to leave New York for Liverpool, and after a few weeks in England, cross to France and Italy, from whence they would sail on the Mediterranean to Egypt, visit the pyramids, and return by way of the Red Sea and Cape of Good Hope.

"If you see any scenery as wild and romantic as we have here along the dear old Allegheny," Grace said, "tell us about it when you return."

Arriving in New York, they visited the many attractions of the great metropolis, which, to Nina, was one ever-changing series of pleasures and delights; Central Park, with its museum of art and relics of antiquity, filled her with rapture.

Twice daily she wrote home, and while her letters were a source of happiness to her father, they added greatly to his discomfort by the pathetic way in which she complained of his absence.

Finally the day for their sailing arrived, and a fond good-by was wired to her father, Nina adding her intention to cable so soon as the other side was reached.

As they walked up the gangway to the deck of the ponderous steamer which, with the swell of the restless water rose and fell like a thing of life, Nina thought of the patient camel, "The Ship of the Desert," starting on its voyage over the trackless waste.

The thoughts that came to her mind filled her with fantastic cravings never felt before. "I feel hysterical, dear," she said to her husband; "let us remain outside till we are out aways."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Standing upon the deck, they watched the city recede from view. A cold breeze blowing from the north-east caught them, as they crossed Sandy Hook, wrapping the woman's garments tightly to the graceful figure they enveloped.

The air was raw and penetrating, but unmindful she stood, as did many others, with that inscrutable fascination which seizes one when the first thrill of the quivering movement is felt beneath one's feet.

In silence she watched the vanishing city; upon her dark lashes glistened a tear, and when at last the distant church spires sank beneath the crest of the ocean, and a curtain of sky dropped placidly between, woman-like she folded her arms upon her husband's shoulder and broke into a fit of weeping.

To such a nature, filled with the gentler impulses, what a chance to win her everlasting love by words of kindly sympathy! Even the gentle patting of a consoling hand upon the head would have been balm to the little homesick heart; but George Weatherbee, lacking in these himself, could only regard the affair as a matter of course.

As they turned to go inside, he abruptly withdrew his arm, and thrust her from his side.

"Don't make a fool of yourself, there's no funeral around here, this is supposed to be a wedding trip."

As he spoke, he curled his lip sarcastically and walked away. She watched him as he mounted to the upper decks. She knew it was foolish to cry, but his words, unnecessarily harsh, crushed and

## A SAD VOYAGE

froze every womanly instinct of her being, and from that time on she was never herself in his presence, for she felt there was nothing about her he could appreciate. As a natural consequence, her sunny disposition changed to a morbid silence, and he, unable to understand, reached the conclusion that he had a sulky wife on his hands.

When an idea once fixed itself upon his mind it became delusional, and regarding her silence in this distorted way, he allowed no opportunity to pass whereby he might add to her discomfort. Knowing her abhorrence of drink, and deeming it fine sport to do the things against which her character rebelled, his actions became so conspicuous as to excite disgust and gossip among the passengers.

One night, with a party of young sports on their way to attend the London races, he became "hail-fellow-well-met," spending his money and drinking freely. In the card room they sat around a small table, George entertaining the crowd with stories of the oil country, but saying nothing of himself or family beyond that his father was a wealthy oil producer.

"Who is the sweet little dame you have with you, old fellow?" one of the party asked.

This unwonted levity was quite a surprise, and not knowing it was his deportment that had occasioned the question, it irritated him, for in his heart he knew there was nothing about Nina of which to be ashamed.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"I hope, sir," he retorted, placing his glass upon the table, "you do not refer to my wife."

"Your wife! pardon me."

"Yes, *my wife*, sir; we are on our wedding trip."

Not another word was spoken; the group exchanged a few significant glances, and then, one by one, left the room. As the last one was about to depart, he turned, and taking a stand beside the chair occupied by George, stooped and whispered in his ear:

"My friend, you have made an ass of yourself; for if she is your wife, you have cruelly wronged her by maintaining a demeanor which has been shamefully interpreted. It is up to you to square yourself; in my opinion, she is too damn good for you."

For a while, Weatherbee sat alone, his pride sorely crushed; then he ordered another drink before retiring to his stateroom.

Coming into his wife's presence, his eyes twinkling with the restlessness of intoxication, he threw himself limply into a chair, while his hat clung threateningly to the back of his head, with a disposition to fall at every upheaval of a continuous hiccup.

"How do you like me with this beautiful jag," he asked, stretching his legs at full length upon the floor.

For a time she stood before him, mentally comparing *this* man, her husband, with the ideal one of her love dreams. She knew too, that he had no other purpose in such indulgence than to gall the wounds he had already made.

## A SAD VOYAGE

Not the slightest emotion did she betray, but remained calm and dignified, her eyes flashing back a defiance he could not comprehend.

"George Weatherbee," she finally began, clasping her hands before her, "is it not enough that you hurt my feelings by unkind words, without forgetting yourself?

"Do you suppose when a few days ago you promised to 'love and protect me,' our friends could believe it possible your vow to God and man would so soon be forgotten?

"If you care no more than this for your word, or for me, surely you were cruel in allowing our fathers to insist as they did on our marriage. And, George, I promised father to love you, and if you could understand, and know how much I am willing to do so, you would not torture me in this cruel way.

"Your drinking has not been to satisfy an erratic appetite, but to hurt me; it shall not, though; I am your wife, George Weatherbee, and as such have a duty, and from now on I shall bend every effort to please you; and if I fail, before I will submit to your outrageous conduct, I will leave you and go back to father; leave you—do you understand?"

He drew up his legs and crossed his knees, shaking the free foot while he spoke. "Don't go to-night, deary. We're too far out, you know; didn't know you could swim, he! he!"

"Oh, taunt, if you find any pleasure in it, I am above anything you may say—this trip ends at Liverpool."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Think so?" he said, fumbling his pockets for a cigarette. "Don't think I am so full as that; you're going with me as my little sister planned; in England, women 'cut no ice,' so if you want to keep out of police quarters, just keep agoing.

"Since we left New York you've kept yourself shut up like a little neck-clam, and now when you open, you start out as a sort of lobster preaching intemperance; wait till we get to London; you'll find better material than me to work on; get a poke-bonnet, with red and lettered trimmings; what a sweet little Salvationist you will be! he! he!"

"Yes, I have been silent, I'll admit, but you froze me into silence by your cruel treatment, and your cold unfeeling words. You wounded me, and made no effort to right the wrong. It was foolish to cry, I'll admit, but a woman cannot control her feelings at times; her nature is emotional—God made it such—that in her cravings for affection His will might be done. And since it was ordained by Him that my lot in life should be that of a woman, am I to blame for possessing the sentiments given her?"

"That's right, Nina, women are as full of sentiments, love-catching sentiments, as the tentacles on a devil fish. I know what they are—want to be loved and petted all the time, and if they don't get it from the one—their legitimate channel, as you call it—they kick over the traces and go after some other fellow who, at home, is just as unable to love his own wife, he! he!"

## A SAD VOYAGE

"This does not surprise me, George Weatherbee, but confirms my first opinion of you. But thank God, all men are not like you! How could you forget your mother—your sister!"

"Had you less of your father's selfishness, and more of your mother's Christian spirit, your heart, in justice to her, could not conjure such belief; and for their sake, if not for mine, put more faith in woman. I can see now why some women fall, God help them!"

"Go on, go on, you'll be in fine trim to join the missionary clan when we reach Cape Town; why didn't you do a little of this eloquent preaching instead of those beautiful snubs, Miss Smedley—Weatherbee? I didn't marry you to love you, I wanted to show you that George Weatherbee knows no defeat.

"You thought it fine sport, at first, to show the marble-heart; when I might have been able to love you, you tried to play the cat with me, by imposing your presence at my home on the pretense of visiting my sister; but when your game failed to work, and your crazy old father in his desire for filthy lucre sold you for fifty thousand barrels of certificate oil, which my old man was to place to our credit as soon as the knot was tied, what right have you now to expect affection?

"All you have coming is money, ha! ha! You weren't looking for a man of any standing, some plug of a driller with sand-pumpings sprinkled on

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

his hat, like that Payne fellow, was your speed, he! he!"

Nina, whose gaze had been riveted upon the floor, raised her head and shot a glance of hatred straight at him. Motionless she stood, apparently lost in thought; then as springs the tiger upon its unsuspecting prey, she sprang upon him, burying her soft white fingers, now like the talons of some fierce bird, deep into the tissues of his neck.

"You lie, you lie! you lie!!" she screamed, dragging him from the chair to the floor, every fiber of her being quivering with the awful tension of nervous frenzy.

With difficulty he extricated himself from her grasp, and regaining his feet he caught her hair, which in the momentary tussle had become disheveled, and jerked her violently across the room, where she fell heavily against the door. For a time she lay apparently lifeless, then rising upon her elbow, a look of bewilderment in her eyes, spoke half to herself.

"My father sell me? Oh, no, he is too kind, he loves me—he has been too fond of me"; then as if a vision came before her, she stretched her arms imploringly, and called in pleading tones, "Father, come and take me home, no one loves me as you do, come, come, my dear old daddy, Ah, take me."

The arm dropped, a stare fixed itself upon her face for a moment, and she fell calmly into unconsciousness.

## A SAD VOYAGE

Days passed; the balance of the voyage she remained in bed under the care of a physician, who conjectured more regarding her case than he cared to express.

As they neared Liverpool she was able to sit up, and the day they were to touch port she came out on deck. Several of the lady passengers stopped to talk with her, each commenting on how pale she looked, and each suggesting a remedy.

It was a lovely day, the air was warm, from out the clear sky the sun shone brightly down, reflecting its rays from the whiteness of the deck, and the sea, as if to harmonize with the day, became tranquil, its glassy surface stretching far to leeward.

Preparations to go ashore were going on hurriedly. The voices of the officers giving orders, mingled in mild confusion with the clatter of ropes and clanking of chains.

Nina reclined in an easy chair watching the gulls flit about, their white wings sparkling in the sunshine. George stood looking over the gunwale watching a small packet-boat steaming toward them.

Coming alongside, a man in uniform, bearing a parcel of papers, climbed to the deck on a rope ladder thrown from the rail, and walked directly to the captain's quarters.

It was not long till they returned together, and walked directly to where George still stood, looking down upon the small vessel steaming away.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"A cablegram, for you, sir," the captain said, addressing him.

Nina rose, and walked to his side. "What is it?" she asked plaintively, at the same time looking over his arm.

"Cablegram," he replied, "more congratulations," he added meaningfully.

"Open it quickly," she pleaded.

Opening, and unfurling the paper, they read together the sad news of her father's death. "Return, father Smedley dead."

As a quivering sparrow, when pierced by a dart, gives one glance of despair, and momentarily retains its hold before it falls, so did poor Nina stand trembling, burning, her eyes staring at the last and horrible word.

"Dead!" she exclaimed, "my father dead! no, no, it cannot be, there must be a mistake"; she read it again, and seeing the signature, "Grace," the import of it all was forced upon her, and she fell into the arms of the captain who had remained beside her.

## CHAPTER XXVII

"WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE"

FOR a time Boyd made an excellent hand on a lease. Pumping jobs were regarded as the lazy man's refuge, but naturally Boyd was not lazy; nervous people never are, unless their nervous distortia assumes a disposition to malinger.

Sitting in a boiler house with nothing to do but the occasional trying of the water, or packing the stem of a Frink globe valve, had a bad effect upon Jim's erratic nervous organism, which he tried to remedy by making frequent requisitions on the grog-shops of the town.

Following the decadence of the Cherry Grove field McKean County experienced a second boom. The "Producer's Paradise," which for a time had been neglected by the spirit of greed driving the happy inmates from their Eden, once more invited the weary wanderers beneath the shelter of its surety.

Many who had recklessly disposed of their property, came back and fretted sorely over the "Paradise" they had so foolishly lost.

Once more the creak of the beam and the groan of the crown-pulley mingled their monotonous sounds with the blazing whir of bull-whills, unwinding the tools to the bottom of every old well.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Wells abandoned during the mad rush for Warren County were cleaned out, recased, tubed, and put to pumping. Even the smallest producers were also cleaned out, for it had been demonstrated that the oil-bearing sand of the McKean field would stand repeated "shooting."

Boyd's drinking bouts became very annoying. I loved him dearly too, and would have given anything to wean him from the miserable habit.

I saw it would be much better to have him more actively engaged, so I purchased a new drilling outfit and set him to work cleaning out my wells, for you can never make a pumper of a good driller, and Jim was a true Knight of the "Temper Screw." When I told him my plans, he fairly leaped with joy.

My Number One well upon the lease I had received in lieu of wages, was badly paraffined, so it was on this well that we initiated our new tools.

After patching up around the rig, cutting the belt and driving keys, we pulled the tubing and rods to make ready for the tools. The tubing out, the measuring line showed the hole to be filled above the top of the sand.

"Keep me busy," Jim would say, "and I'll drink nothing stronger than crude oil." In a few days the steel-tape showed us to be on bottom and ready for the "shot."

Imagine my delight, when poor old No. One, with her wabbly beam, decaying sills, and sickly production of one barrel a day, was transformed in a week



*"Poor old No. 1, with her wabbly beam, decaying sills, etc."*



"WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE"

to a hundred-barrel producer. Jim's skilled hand, and a bump of nitro-glycerine had accomplished this wonderful and pleasing result.

Thus encouraged we lost no time in dealing likewise with the other wells, and money began to roll into my bank account so rapidly that I found it hard to understand or realize the poverty of my earlier days. But in my business transactions I could see a conservatism which undoubtedly was the offspring of my previous economy.

Daily I was receiving propositions from promoters of various schemes, asking me to invest, and promising big returns, but I disregarded their claims, knowing it was the temptation which had lured many into the quagmire of financial ruin.

All this time the oil market advanced with a steady trend. Near the city of Lima, Ohio, an inferior grade of oil had been discovered, but attempts at refining it had proved fruitless; which was a good thing for the Pennsylvania product, and the Producer's Fraternity contented itself in nursing the belief that Ohio's oil product in the future would have to be utilized for fuel, instead of illuminating purposes.

As I had never crossed the boundary of Pennsylvania, and feeling the need of a little recreation, I made a trip into Ohio.

I had no intention of investing there, but the wells yielded freely and possessing the true oil man's venturesome spirit, I determined to tie up a lease or two, before returning home.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

There was nothing loose near the city, so if I wanted a lease I would have to go some distance from developments, and this I concluded to do.

Hiring a rig at the livery stable, I drove some ten miles into the country to where a certain Mr. Jones\* had a large tract—a section, they called it.

The poor old fellow had been bored nearly to death by “men a leasin’ for ile,” so when I introduced myself as one, he walked away, refusing to even give me a hearing.

He was in the barnyard when I drove up, so hitching my horse to the fence, which enclosed the barn and its surrounding sheds from the highway, which was known as the “Lima Pike,” I dislodged one of the bars, and “juked” under the top rail.

Then, replacing the end into its accustomed slot, I walked directly to where he was busily engaged repairing a corn drill.

His overalls were a patchwork showing years of continuous repair, not a thread remaining to show texture of the original cloth.

From under a pair of long bushy eyebrows he scanned me with a scrutiny I did not like—the scrutiny of suspicion, while his red-and-black plaid shirt peeped from under a scraggy, silver-streaked beard, which harmonized with the unshorn locks hanging

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\*In this chapter the writer wishes to be understood as reflecting no discredit upon the education of the Ohio farmer. I have merely brought out a variety of experiences, which came to me when leasing oil territory in Ohio and Indiana.      AUTHOR.

“WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE”

from under the brim of an old conical-shaped hat, the color of which had long since vanished.

With the exception of the barn, a beautiful red structure bearing across its gables the name of its owner and the date of erection, everything had an unmistakable air of poverty.

The dwelling, a relic of pioneer days and built of primitive logs, stood, with its mud-filled chinks, in fretted contrast to the majestic red structure poised proudly upon a masonry of limestone.

“Is this Mr. Jones?” I inquired.

“I reckon,” he replied curtly, without quitting his work.

“Nice barn you have,” I remarked, looking at it admiringly.

“Pretty good,” he returned, relaxing a little.

“Have you lived here long?” I asked, in hopes of drawing him into conversation.

“Born here,” he replied, pointing with a wrench toward the house.

“Indeed, you must be very much attached to the place,” I returned.

“Bout as good as eny, I reckon, nothin’ in rolling around.”

“You are quite right, Mr. Jones,” I agreed, seating myself upon an empty wagon-box near by. ‘A rolling stone gathers no moss.’”

“Where did you hail from?” he asked, adjusting his wrench to a nut.

“Pennsylvania is my home,” I made answer.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"So," he returned quickly. "Are you from the ile diggin's?"

Feeling it was time to state my mission, I rose and stepped to his side.

"Yes, Mr. Jones, that is the part of the country I am from; I am in the oil business there, and hearing about the wells out here, I came to look around. At Lima, I learned of your large tract of land, and drove out to see if I could secure a lease from you."

"To bore for ile?" he interrogated, pointing a finger straight down toward the ground.

"In hopes of finding it," I returned.

With a gesture of exasperation, he hurled the wrench savagely into a box under the seat of the corn drill, and without another word left abruptly and walked toward the house, around which was a grassy plot separated from the barnyard by a picket fence.

Reaching the gate, which lopped upon a leather hinge, he paused as if in deep thought; then turning, bade me to quit the place.

"Get your horse, and drive on," he commanded.

I was so amazed at his unwonted actions and uncalled-for rudeness, that I stood staring at him.

"There's been a swarm of ye pesky ile men 'round here of late," he went on, shaking a fist at me threateningly, "slick chaps too, I reckon, but ye can't have no papers for this place, there'll be no ile holes bored on this place, mind ye."

There was a candor, an earnestness, a simplicity about his tone, that was childlike, and regardless of

## "WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE"

his protestations I followed him into the house, determined to win his confidence, if nothing more.

"Don't be angry with me, Mr. Jones," I pleaded, "you do not have to lease your farm unless you choose, besides, I am in no hurry."

"What's the use in harrowing 'bout it then?" he demanded, throwing a glance toward his wife, in which I read, "'Nother one of them sharpers."

"No use," I agreed, "only you walked away from me as though I was a very bad fellow. I didn't hurt your feelings, I hope."

He shook his head negatively, and then, as if yielding to some generous impulse, he motioned me with a gesture of the head, into another room.

It evidently was the best one, clean, but sparsely furnished. His wife, a thin angular-faced woman, whose dear, rough, sun-brownèd hands, told how faithfully she had toiled with him, followed in after me.

In an instant my heart went out to her, for I remembered how my own dear mother had toiled till the same imprints were stamped upon the hands ever willing to slave for my welfare.

"We'll not lease the place," she said, addressing me in tones meant to convey that his decision was authentic. "We got cheeted wunce by a fellow what minds me of you ile men. He talked us into gitting the lightnin' rods on the barn, and we were jest fools nuff to sine the papers and we lowed then that we'd never sine eny more papers for eny body."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Oh, Mrs. Jones, you do not understand," I said, and was about to explain.

"We're not fools," she continued, "we understand that there's a whole lot of lazy scamps what makes their living going round lying and cheating honest folks what's not afraid to work, and the last ile man what was here 'bout leasing, had a right smart of sass too; tried to tell me how much I zembled his mother, and that he was agoing to fetch me a new dress pattern next time he come out. He said his name was Weatherbee, and that he lived clean way in Pennsylvania."

"He's from Pennsylvany too," Mr. Jones interrupted, pointing a finger at me.

"Ide never have thought it," she said assuringly.

"Do I look so bad as all that, Mrs. Jones?" I asked, smiling a little.

"I'm not saying whether you look bad or good, I only want you to know we won't sine eny kind of papers," and with this, she returned to her duties in the kitchen.

"I see, Mr. Jones," I began, as soon as she left the room, "that your refusal to lease your farm is owing to unpleasant experience with some trickster, who worked the lightning rod game on you; strange too, that many of the Ohio courts sustained the claims of those rascals; but politics is politics the world over; no doubt many of the lightning rod concerns were a part of some combination, who, with political power on one side, elected men to office who upheld their

## "WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE"

avaricious scheme, which apparently were in no way connected with them.

"You will find, with scarcely an exception, the cleanest men in the oil business. I see you are willing to lease your farm, if you were sure of honest treatment.

"Let me advise you what to do. Don't take my word for anything, but go to a good reliable attorney at Lima, and have him frame a lease the way you would like to have your farm operated, submit it to me, and if satisfactory, I'll accept it, and develop the land accordingly."

I explained to him what it meant to have a farm rich in oil, made a conservative estimate as to what a royalty from a few producers would net them in their declining years, and that no outlay of money would be necessary on their part, and lastly, that if the land was no good for oil, I alone would be out a few thousand dollars.

At this juncture his wife came in from the kitchen, and as she opened the door the savory odor of fried ham greeted my nostrils, as the long drive had given me a keen appetite.

"Joel," she said, in a way that Joel understood, "go and feed that horse, he's not going to tote that buggy back to Lima without his feed, and you"—she turned to me, "if you're not too tony to eat with common folks, better eat a bite before you hitch back."

Joel obeyed, and started to where my horse stood,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

pawing the ground by the fence. Feeling it would be no more than right to go with him, I was about to follow, when she restrained me.

"He can take care of him, dinner's nigh ready, so you had better wash at the pump there."

I obeyed, as did Joel. "Strange people," I thought, "but the soul of goodness and honor."

The consideration she had for the poor dumb brute spoke volumes. Beneath that plain garment of calico beat the heart of one of God's women, and from out those eyes, dimmed with the mist of time, looked the soul of God's handiwork—woman untainted, save by honest toil.

No vanity had drugged those eyes to dazzle the gods of society, no cosmetics had ever added lustre to those time-furrowed cheeks, no baby she had ever brought into the world had ever been denied the warmth of a mother's breast—"God bless you!" I thought, "you have taught me more than you will ever know."

"Say, who will pay the lawyer?" Mr. Jones began, returning to the subject so soon as he came in from the barn.

"That won't be much," I said, "but I will pay it."

"Would you 'gree to let me do all the teaming?"

"Certainly, Mr. Jones, agree to anything in reason."

"Suppose you get ile, how much will be for me?"

"I would not object to one-sixth royalty."

"Only one-six!" he returned in surprise; "that Weatherbee fellow said he would give one-eight."

"WE SHALL NOT LEASE THE PLACE"

"One-eighth?" I corrected, and he nodded.

"Isn't my offer the better of the two?"

He looked suspiciously at me.

"Eight's more'n six, isn't it?"

Taking a couple of matches from my pocket, I demonstrated the difference between the two fractions, which pleased them, and won for me a goodly share of their confidence; and when I was ready to leave, much to my surprise, they scorned the attempt I made to pay for my dinner and horse feed.

According to my promise I drove out the next day and succeeded in arranging to have them meet me at the office of a well-known attorney at Lima, who drafted a ten-year lease upon a rental of one dollar per acre per annum, and which would be null and void if no wells were drilled by the expiration of that time.

After the lease was properly signed and acknowledged, I took them to my hotel, and in a way tried to return the generosity and hospitality they had shown me.

"You hated me as an oil man," I laughingly remarked, "but took pity on the real man, and gave him his dinner."

"I wouldn't see a dog go hungry, Mr. Payne," the woman said, "but I didn't hate you, the Bible don't teach that; it teaches to love your enemies; why, if that same lightnin' rod man'd come round hungry, I'd feed him, but we wouldn't sine no papers, that's gospil truth."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"All right, Mrs. Jones," I said, grasping her hand warmly, "I expect to look up a few more leases out your way, and I will call and see you every chance I have, for I want you to know me better."

As I helped them into their old yacht-body vehicle, I felt as they drove away that I had won their friendship as well as their confidence, and that pleased me more than the securing of the lease.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE

THE evening before I was to leave Ohio I received a telegram stating that Boyd had been killed, and it came as a severe blow, for indeed I thought the world of poor Jim.

Since going on the tools, he had not taken a single drink of liquor, and had cleaned out every well I owned; and while the results were not so good in each case as with the first, yet my production was increased many fold.

The last well being cleaned and shot we started to develop the undrilled locations, and it was on one of the new wells that he met his death; and his untimely end was the fate which many an unfortunate driller had met before.

They were in the sand, with a showing for a good well, and had just started to pull out, when Jim stepped to the bull-whills to steer the slack; his foot caught the rope running to the bull-rope trip, and plunging forward, caught his hand between the coils of the heavy cable and revolving shaft.

His helper, or rather his tool dresser, sprang to the reverse cord, and shut off the steam, but—too late! the poor fellow had been whipped into the deadly throes, and crushed lifeless in the space of a second.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

I took sole charge of the remains of my faithful old friend, and had he been my brother I could not have been more grieved. No man ever had better principles than he, but the world, in its vanity and selfishness, knew not of his existence. His life was one of useful toil--a friend to all but himself.

If he had relatives, I was in ignorance of their whereabouts; in vain I telegraphed to various places in hopes of finding some one of his kin, but all efforts in this line having proved unavailing, I then selected from among his associates a funeral party, who with me, accompanied the body to St. Petersburg, where we laid him to rest in a grave not far from my father's, and the same minister, changed only as time changes all things here, preached the funeral sermon.

I recalled to his memory my father's death, telling him how his prayer in my behalf had never left me, and I shall never forget his look of astonishment when word for word I was able to repeat it to him.

After I had finished, grasping both my hands in his own, and looking earnestly into my face, he said, "My dear sir, I have labored all my life for the betterment of mankind, and how much I have accomplished I know not. I always leave results with God. But if my prayer of long ago has clung to and influenced you as you say it has, and which I believe, from the way you have remembered it, I feel that I have been well rewarded and that these years of labor have not been in vain." Then, relaxing a hand and placing

## A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE

it upon my head, he continued, "God bless you again, may we meet in heaven."

The sermon he preached over poor Jim was brief, yet in keeping with all the circumstances of his life so near as I was able to give them.

"This man," he said, with a gentle wave of the hand toward the casket, "never attended any church, and with the exception of a weakness for strong drink, I have the assurance that he was a good man. We are told that 'In my Father's house are many mansions,' so let us trust in God's boundless mercy and pray, 'Thy will be done.' "

What a flood of memories rushed into my mind as, standing beside a grassy mound, I renewed the grief and reminiscences of my childhood; naturally I thought of the little Nina, she whom I had met but once since those happy days of long, long ago.

The funeral over, I bade the boys return without me. "This is the scene of my bare-footed days," I said, "and I shall not go back till every favorite nook has been visited"; so shaking the hand of each, I hurried away from the church-yard, down over the slope to the woods where we had lived when my father met his death at the ill-fated "Nelly."

Ah, how my heart thrilled with new and strange emotions as I entered the woods, and at the very same place where Nina and I had crept through the fence after visiting the grave of the murdered woodchuck. How the natural aroma of the woods, associated in my mind with the longings of anxious

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

childhood, lifted my spirits with a joy never before experienced.

Hail, dear spot of my boyhood: love for you shall ever reside in my heart. Hail, ye grand old trees! the happiest hours of my life were passed beneath your loving shadows, for then, thoughtless as the birds that sung within your branches, I laughed away all care, nor knew of evil.

Then to the place where stood our little, rough board home, before moving to Antwerp, and where my mother had slaved over a wash-tub, that we might not be objects of charity; down to the "Nelly," where a few charred sills remained as sole relics of that dreadful catastrophe; here, there, and everywhere, the favorite haunts of my youth I visited with an eagerness akin to sorrow.

How distances between places had shortened! The long walk to the Indian cave had shrunk to a few steps, and it did not seem so large as when, in childish triumph, I pointed into its gray and gloomy vault and told to my little playmate the story of the boy who, under the natural bridge of Virginia, risked his life that his name might appear above that of the father of his country.

There still was the dark corner in which we took refuge, and there too was the spur of the rock upon which Boyd and Weatherbee sat, and from whose lips I heard the plot, the foiling of which was the cause of my father's death.

Then I thought of the plain, honest farm woman

## A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE

back in Ohio, who but a few days before had been promised a dress pattern by the same polished villain; and musing, I asked myself, "What conception or idea can such characters entertain of the future?"

Before taking my departure I visited the cemetery with the sexton, to arrange for such attention as I felt my father's grave required, and musingly I walked among the graves, stopping now and then to read the epitaphs upon the tomb-stones.

In a neglected corner, upon a modest slab of unpolished marble, the name "Martin" arrested my attention, and bending low to read the small letters beneath I knew from the description, "wife of —— Martin, killed in the battle of Gettysburg, etc.," that our old friend had passed beyond this vale of tears and was at rest from its cares and tireless deceptions.

"If there is a heaven," I thought, "her title there will surely be free from moth and rust, and where thieves cannot break through and steal."

As I would pass through Oil City *en route* for home I decided to stop and visit the place before continuing my journey, for love, fanned into flame by the old-time familiar scenes that I had just visited, with their inseparable associations, were directing my thoughts and prompting my actions. There was no denying it, I longed to see Nina.

I thought of the joy of retracing the events of our childhood together; what strange emotions take possession of our being when we feel that one we love is

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

near! How my heart throbbed when I stepped from the train into the city where I knew she dwelt!

I went to the Oil Exchange in hopes of meeting either her husband or his father, but was informed by an elderly gentleman that it had been several months since Weatherbee had been seen around the Exchange.

"What does the young man do?" I inquired.

"Everybody he can," he answered significantly, and from the abrupt reply I was able to draw my own conclusions as to the esteem George Weatherbee enjoyed in this man's estimation.

"He is evidently a chip off the old block, then," I ventured.

"He's more than a chip, he's a whole slab."

"He was married a year ago, was he not?"

"Yes, a year last May; got a little wife who is a thousand times too good for him."

"Does she know it?"

"Too well, I'm afraid."

"You know her, then?"

"Yes," he replied, nodding his head thoughtfully.

"I knew her when she was a child," I said, feeling I could speak freely to him. "We were great little chums, and I thought of calling on her while in the city."

He looked at me sharply, and asked, "Are you John Payne?"

"Yes," I returned, "Whom have *I* the pleasure of addressing?"

## A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE

He looked around as if measuring the distance between ourselves and the men standing by, then, as if not satisfied, rose from his seat and invited me to a corner more remote from the busy end of the room.

"Mr. Payne," he began, as soon as we were seated, "inscrutable Providence has thrown us together. You were here during the shut-down movement, and met Miss Smedley at a Charity Ball, and afterward wrote her requesting the privilege to call—am I right?"

"Perfectly, sir," I replied, my interest fully aroused.

"Answer me one question, as man to man, Mr. Payne; be frank with me, and trust me to justify my position later."

"Ask it, sir," I broke in abruptly.

"When you wrote to Miss Smedley, was it"—and he paused, "because you liked her that you wished to call?"

"It was," I replied, feeling a flush on my face. "To be candid, sir, there was something about Miss Smedley which appealed to me, and I had hoped to see her before leaving, but being unexpectedly called away, I addressed her by letter.

"To insure a safe and timely delivery I sent it by a messenger boy, and when I returned home I mentioned the affair to my mother, who, at the name 'Smedley' reminded me of the possibility of it being the little Nina who, as I have told you, was my chum during the days of our childhood."

"Say no more," he raised his hand at me as he

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

spoke. "My name is Graham, and I loved Nina as I would a child of my own. I am a pretty old man, and let me add, Mr. Payne, am a pretty good judge of human nature.

"You love her, every word you uttered, every line of your face betrays it, and I ask you now for the sake of her who is dear to both you and me, turn from your purpose, and leave Oil City without seeing her.

"Her miserable husband is jealous of you; time and time again he has taunted her by reference to your name; so if you have any word to send her, I think it much wiser to trust it to me."

"There is much I would like to say, Mr. Graham, but circumstances will not permit, though you can tell her that I regret having failed to recognize her that night at the Charity Ball; also, that my mother is living and well, and that I have just returned from a trip to St. Petersburg, and that we grieved in learning of her father's untimely death, and to accept our sincere sympathy in her bereavement."

"Seven, seven—seven-eighths," a broker began to shout from the Bull Ring, and in a few minutes every one was yelling; so to get away from the noise we walked out of the Exchange together.

As we reached the street, and before separating he said, "Remember, 'All is well that ends well'; don't give up the ship." With these parting words he shook my hand and walked away.

I watched him till he vanished around a corner,

## A DRILLER'S AWFUL MISTAKE

then turning I walked to the station and took the next train home.

"All is well that ends well, don't give up the ship." These words kept running over and over through my mind.

"What did he mean? I thought I understood, but how could it be?" That was the question which compelled me to admit I did not understand.

## CHAPTER XXIX

"I LEAVE YOU FOREVER."

SEVERAL months had elapsed since the collapsing of the freak pool at Cherry Grove.

With that confidence born of successful enterprise and venture, Weatherbee looked about him as a fierce animal might look, after subduing the more timid creatures of the jungle.

Greed knows no limits, selfishness no bounds; his ambition began to extend to the wilder parts; he craved to be among the lions of financial undertakings.

If by craft or cunning he could gain power enough to be regarded as a dangerous foe, he would make his roar so loud, so long, so awe-inspiring, that other lions would cower at his approach and forget their own supremacy in recognizing his.

He had made his power felt in the affairs of church, political, civic and private life. What man dare aspire to public office without his sanction? Ah! surely this prestige would admit him where'er he chose to go.

From the kremlin of his positive egotism, like a Napoleon, he looked out upon his vast army of less resolute subjects, who unconsciously were executing plans meant to install him upon the gilded throne of mammon.

## "I LEAVE YOU FOREVER"

To compel the Standard Oil Company to fear him, and through that fear admit him to the fold, was the greatest desire of his selfish heart.

With the tactics of a snake, he lured a declining politician to introduce a bill in the State Senate, the character of which was to hamper and impede the progress of the Standard Oil Company in Pennsylvania. This was the first roar at the "monarch of finance."

It was then politely hinted to Standard Oil, that a man so rich in public influence as was Mr. Weatherbee of Oil City should be secured at any cost, for he, with one swoop of his diplomatic arm, could crush the bill pending in the House.

This was his second roar, but like the first, having to be made by one of his whelps, it died away without so much as an echo, and alarmed no one except a few of the curs who had been hired to bark outside at the lobbyists.

In the meantime he concluded it would be best to roar himself, so he dashed boldly into the refining of oil. This, he felt sure would make them wince. Standard Oil would wake up now!

Now he would show no quarter, but would attack Standard Oil on all sides, hurl missiles at them through the Senate, oppose everything for their interest, cut the price of refined oil in the face of their best marketing places, and roar, and roar till the great octopus arose from its oily depths with fear and trembling.

He would then demand a place among the tentacles

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

of the gigantic brute, learn its fondest secrets, and roar himself as ruler over one of its many arms.

That Standard Oil would never tolerate a competitor such as he had estimated himself to be, he was sure. They certainly knew better than to try to "pinch" a man of his ingenuity; one glimpse of his power and they would admit him to the temple of mammon, and once inside he would push out the pillars, and from the wreck of matter and crash of ruins build a temple of his own.

With the exception of the Smedley home, which had been deeded to George as a wedding present, nothing of the estate remained. Every cent of its value had gone to complete his magnificent refining plant.

Nina knew nothing of her father's business affairs beyond that he possessed considerable valuable property, and that he had invested heavily in certificates, but never dreamed of his having plunged to such awful depths.

She was kept in ignorance of the true state of affairs by Weatherbee, who evaded all inquiry by assuring her that all was as her father had wished it.

Poor girl! while she felt all was not right, she had to learn from her old friend, Mr. Graham, the pitiable condition she was in financially, though she was conscious of a great change in every member of the Weatherbee family, as they treated her with cold indifference.

George succeeded in making his family think him

## "I LEAVE YOU FOREVER"

a badly nagged and hen-pecked husband, and by his continual complaining and fault finding led them to believe that unhappy, heart-broken Nina was a shrew, badly in need of taming.

The day Mr. Graham called she was alone in her room when his carriage stopped below; seeing who it was, she bounded down the stairs, meeting him at the door with outstretched arms.

"Oh, Mr. Graham, I am so happy to see you! come in, you dear old man. Why have you kept away so long?"

Holding her as a parent might a child, it was several moments before he could answer her.

In silence they walked to the library, and passing the hall rack she recalled the Christmas night when he had taken her hands in his, and said, "The man that gets these little mits, ought to be a good one."

Freeing herself from him, she ran ahead into the room and cried as though her heart would break.

"If this is an expression of how glad you are to see me," he said, following in after her, "I will call every day. Come, Nina, this won't do."

She raised her head, and smiled through her tears at him.

"I know it," she whispered, "but Mr. Graham, you do not know what I have to contend with. A pleasant smile or look is denied me by those who should be the first to give them."

"I know more, perhaps, than you suspect I do," he replied.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Mr. Graham, you were my father's best friend; strange you never saw things alike. I have decided to leave George Weatherbee. Tell me, Oh, tell me, am I doing right?"

"Why are you going to leave him? I can judge better when I hear your reasons."

"You already know my reasons, Mr. Graham. I am sure you never liked him—you never had any faith in him. He has heaped insult upon insult, in his domineering way; twice he has struck me, and he tells his people that I am to blame for everything. Even Grace has turned against me. Ah, I am weary of it all."

"Why have you endured this so long?"

Her countenance now changed, as with a backward throw of the head she replied, "For the fear of scandal. God only knows what they will say about me when I have taken the final plunge. You will defend me, won't you?"

He nodded affirmatively.

"Be a father to me," she continued, "you are the only one I have now."

"What would you have me do, Nina? Tell me your plans, but first of all do not hesitate to leave this miserable cur. I passed him on the street this morning, and it made me sick to think you had been sacrificed to him."

"Will people blame me, do you think?"

"What if they do? Why, child, people care no more for your happiness or mine, or any one else's,

"I LEAVE YOU FOREVER"

than they do for anything outside their immediate pleasures—damn the people! Do the thing your conscience dictates, and if they talk, it will only be till some new gossip takes its place."

"I will leave here just as soon as I can get father's business together. Father Weatherbee promised some time ago to have everything adjusted, but I fear he may deceive me. He says certain papers exist which have to expire before the estate can be settled, and I want you, Mr. Graham, to attend to this for me, as I am ignorant of all business methods."

"My dear girl, it has been wicked to withhold the facts concerning your father's affairs so long from you. Gladly would I have gone in his stead, but fate consults the wishes of no mortal; we must bow in submission to God's will.

"Your father's death, while tragic, was merciful, for a thousand times better dead than confined to a madman's cell in Warren."

"A madman's cell in Warren! What do you mean—Oh, Mr. Graham, tell me—tell me! What do you mean?"

Mr. Graham looked long and sadly into her face.

"Dear child," he said, "your father left you no estate—he died a pauper, penniless, bankrupted—a victim of aborted faith, and had that not produced his death, it would have driven him insane. He owned nothing but what the father of your husband had covered with mortgage, even to this home, girl, even to this home."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Go on, Mr. Graham," she said despairingly, as he paused.

"There's no more to say, child. God knows, what I have said is enough. This infernal hypocrite began long ago to plan your father's ruin. I could see it, and cautioned him, but he was completely wrapped up in that miserable old Shylock, who, unto death, will be grasping out for the pound of flesh nearest the heart."

"Father was not so reckless, Mr. Graham; surely there must be some mistake."

"There has been a mistake, dear child, but it cannot be remedied now. Whatever you decide to do, be sure to act with judgment and precision, and when in doubt, come to me. Remember, I am always at your service."

He rose, and put on his hat. "I must go," he said. She went to the door with him.

Hesitating a moment, as if turning something over in his mind, he retraced his steps to the hall rack, and sat down. Then, supporting his hands on the crook of his heavy cane, and looking inquiringly into her face, as if to satisfy himself that what he was going to say was right, he motioned her nearer to him and began:

"Do you want to hear a word from the little boy with whom you spent your childhood, when you lived in the woods upon the river hill?"

He noticed a new light in her eyes as she asked, "Johnny Payne?"

## "I LEAVE YOU FOREVER"

He nodded.

"Yes, indeed; have you seen him?"

He nodded again.

"Where?"

"At the Exchange—he came here with the intention of calling on you, but on my advice turned from his purpose."

"That was kind and thoughtful of you, Mr. Graham; you seem always to know just what to do."

"You remember him the night of the Charity Ball?"

"Was that he? Oh, I was sure it was, but could never learn—tell me, what did he say?"

"Told me to extend to you the sympathy of himself and mother, and that they both grieved at hearing of your father's untimely death, and said to tell you his mother was well."

"What else?"

"Nothing."

Again he rose, and tottered with his cane toward the door.

She did not follow him as before, but stood demurely with downcast eyes, toying with a ring on her finger.

Reaching the doorway, he called her to him. "Good-by," he said, extending his hand, "when I have gone, read the third stanza of Longfellow's 'Rainy Day'; that has much to comfort a spell of sadness."

As his carriage drove away she turned and went back to the library. How quiet the house seemed! How loud the tick of the clocks!

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Many and varied were the emotions that passed through her mind as she put down the book of poems and fell into the old arm chair of her father's—the chair from which he had told the story of her mother's devotion—the chair in which he had sat and championed the cause of the man whose father had betrayed him—the chair at whose side she had so many times rested her head on his knee, and listened to the plans honestly intended to insure the happiness of her future.

"How they have failed," she thought, "and how necessarily must such plans fail, for no one can plan the future of another." She would leave the old home—she would leave George Weatherbee and hide herself where no one would find her.

Thus she mused, but at the thought of leaving—going alone, empty-handed, heavy-hearted, out into the merciless world, she broke anew into a flood of tears; so that the old hound, lying unseen in the corner, came and put his nose in her lap and looked his sympathy from a pair of eyes dimmed with the films of age.

Suddenly the expression of the bleared eyes changed and he skulked back to his corner, emitting a low growl as he went.

The footsteps of George were heard in the hall, and from his mumbling, she knew he had been drinking. He came straight to the library, it being his favorite lounging-place during drinking periods, which had been growing of frequent occurrence.

“I LEAVE YOU FOREVER”

Finding her there, and with the evidence of her grief vivid upon her cheeks, he hurled a bitter insult at her.

“What in hell you been crying for now? Too damn bad you didn’t get your driller,” he sneered, taking hold of her arm.

She sprang to her feet, and thrust him from her. “Don’t touch me, you miserable wretch,” she said, placing a chair between them. “I am done with you.”

“Going over to the driller’s, I suppose,” he retorted, sarcastically.

“The trouble with you,” he continued, “you came from poor stock; your father was a common roust-about when my father first knew him, but he had a streak of luck and got hold of a little money, then gets the idea of being *it*, and——”

“Stop!” she cried, raising her hand. “Don’t you dare to mention my father again.”

She stepped nervously to the fireplace, where a glistening object of steel lay among the bric-a-brac; there was an audible click as she withdrew her hand. “Have you any more to say?” she asked, resting her arm upon the mantle and looking defiantly at him.

There was such a calm in her poise, such an irony of expression in her face, that for a moment he shrank beneath the fire of that resolute gaze.

“If you have anything more to say, or any more insults to add, go on, I will hear you through; but

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

if you say aught to reflect upon my dead father, I will kill you where you stand."

She waited for him to answer, but he said nothing; something in those eyes that remained fixed on him, filled him with fear. It was the look of frenzy, of desperation—that look which comes to the face of a hunted animal when it finally turns upon its pursuers.

"George Weatherbee," she began, her voice trembling with righteous indignation, "I married you, as you are well aware, to please my father. You know, too, that I never cared for you, and from the very first pleaded with you to spare me, as well as yourself, the remorse of an unhappy marriage. Not once did I express a love for you till after we had been made man and wife. God knows, I did try to make myself love you then.

"It was your father and your sister who planned this unfortunate union, and in your declarations of love, which I never believed or took seriously, I was able to see that you were but the mouthpiece of a more cunning mind. I could see the craft which duped my poor father into trusting you with my future, and the night of our wedding I promised him to make you a good and faithful wife. Your father and sister pushed your suit to the point of winning my father's confidence, and with that, all else was easy.

"Have you told them how you treated me on the ocean? Had my father seen you then, he would have

## "I LEAVE YOU FOREVER"

killed you like a dog! The friendship your deceitful old father pretended, was like the slime a snake spews over an unsuspecting victim before proceeding to devour it.

Not satisfied with robbing and killing my confiding father, he must have me for your wife, and to what end?—In the hope of my being able to reform you. I believe in eternal justice, for it is not to be found in this world. I hate you as I would a viper—I hate you all, I hate myself for having the name of Weatherbee attached to me. I am beginning to hate the world, and sometimes I doubt the existence of a God. You and yours have turned my sweetest pleasure to wormwood, and if any evil befalls me let the sin rest with you."

Feeling she was about to break down, and determined he should see no more of her tears, she hurriedly left the room.

"I am not your wife," she said, reaching the door, "I leave you now and forever; such marriages as this are a farce, a disgrace to civilization, a curse on generations yet unborn."

With a sneering laugh he watched her leave the room; then, as her frail form vanished into the hall, he threw himself into a chair and continued to laugh in a taunting way.

"Wait till she finds who owns this shack," he thought, laughing the harder, "That will hold her for awhile, he! he! no such good luck as her going, anyway."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Going to the mantle, he picked up the revolver with which she had threatened his life.

"Was going to shoot me, eh? Well, damn her, I will teach her a trick for that; no petticoat's going to bluff me." He threw it into a corner and dashed out after her.

She was gone! He looked in every room from garret to cellar, in every closet, nook and corner, when a feeling akin to remorse came over him, and he hurried to his father's home and requested Grace to join him in the search, but which proved fruitless; for no trace of Nina was to be found, and had the earth opened and swallowed her their disappointment could not have been more complete.

## CHAPTER XXX

### "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

HURRYING upstairs to her wardrobe Nina selected a heavy cloak, and drawing the hood closely about her face, left the house without the slightest idea of a destination.

At the top of the stairs she discerned the form of her husband turning the landing, and though the lights burned dimly, upon his face she was able to see both hatred and wrath.

To avoid him she slipped into a dark corner and waited a favorable opportunity to pass unseen down the stairs and out into the world.

There were many people on the streets, and while she was sure of not being recognized, she knew the long cloak would excite attention, and probably lead to her identity becoming known.

Turning down one of the side streets, she continued her way along the river front.

"Good-by, old home," she thought, "sad is my heart in leaving thee, but dearer friends have been taken from me; we part to-night, forever."

It was a night of unusual calm; a slight breeze rustled through the shade trees bordering the river's brink. The sky frowned with heavy clouds that here and there were tipped with a wavy, silvery light.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Reaching the old suspension bridge, she crossed over to that dark and desolate portion of the city built under a perpendicular hill, and where many a landslide has wrought havoc among the dwellers.

In the middle of the bridge she stopped and looked down at the inky blackness below.

How still it seemed! no sound was heard save the rippling of the water, as it hurried on over its rocky bed.

"Come with me," it seemed to say, "I will bear you away on my bosom from this world of pain and sorrow."

How it seemed to be coaxing her! she was half tempted to fall over the railing and end the anguish of her aching heart—a few struggles, and all would be over.

From the deep eddy below came the audible click of a boatman's oar, and then, as if in keeping with the beauties of the night, arose as if from the water the sweet voice of a girl singing.

How it thrilled upon the soft evening air! and how poor Nina, in her weird imagination, contrasted the happy heart of the singer with her own, so full of grief and sadness.

Just then the moon broke from under a dark cloud, and cast the rays of its mellow light upon her.

"Heavenly Father, guide me!" and lisping the prayer, she hurried on and was soon lost in the shadows of the Standard's great shops.

Her first impulse was to call at the Arlington and

## "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

ask for Mr. Graham—he had told her to come to him in trouble—but what could he do? Nothing beyond offering money, but she knew he was the dearest and best friend she had; why should she hesitate, and what else was there to do?

The people who lived in that part of the city were strangers to her; she need have no fear of being recognized here, and when the business portion of the city was reached she could pass unnoticed with the thousands of characters upon the streets.

She crossed Oil Creek, that mystic stream of strange tradition, where long ago the primitive red man taught his children how the Great Spirit, to soothe the troubles of the nation, placed the oil upon the water, as a token that the flowing lives of the people could be calmed by words of kindness.

In that humble spot, known as Oil Creek flats, just north of the city's line, there lived a hard working widow whose husband had been killed by the explosion of a still at one of the refineries, which, unfortunately for her, was not a Standard plant, as Standard Oil has generously pensioned every widow they have made.

Since the death of her husband, she had provided for her children by faithful application to the scrub-broom and wash-tub, which together with house cleaning, enabled her to keep her little flock around her.

As Nina crossed the Oil Creek bridge she thought of the widow who had worked for her, and when

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Seneca Street was reached, instead of going to the Arlington she turned north, and hurried along in hope of reaching the place before the woman had gone to bed.

Passing the Oil Exchange, a strange feeling came over her. She felt that within its walls her father had been murdered, and realized how that aristocratic gambling den had been the cause of all her wretchedness; and as she passed the majestic building of the Standard upon the opposite corner she prayed God that Standard Oil would succeed in getting control of the market, and forever wipe the Exchange curse from the face of the earth.

On and on she hurried, passing the great tube mills and boiler works along the creek's border to the grimy flats where stood the cottage of the widow.

Upon a rough bench outside a number of wash-tubs stood in a row, while from the ground arose the vapor of sour suds, evidence of the countless washings which the old bench had sustained.

Through the little uncurtained window of eight by ten panes the flickering rays of a smoky oil lamp shone feebly into the night, and inside the form of the widow flitted about, dividing her time between a stove in the corner and arranging a few plain dishes upon the table.

In an anxious group sat the children, patiently waiting the preparation of the evening meal, and upon the face of the mother was an expression of happiness and that look of contentment which follows after a day of hard, honest toil.

## "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

For several moments Nina viewed the scene through the window. "Why should I be unhappy?" she asked herself. "That God loves the poor is evidenced upon every line of her face; I would rather slave in poverty all my life and be true to myself, than live in luxury with the name of Weatherbee attached to me."

She clenched her soft little hand, and raised it to rap upon the door, but hesitated. It was that hesitancy which, winged by caution, precedes all unfamiliar venture.

She stood upon the brink of some mysterious chasm, the depths of which were o'ershadowed by the dark clouds of fickle fate.

Life is a series of ever-changing events, and the one which to us seems most insignificant is usually the one which chance had ordained to mould our character and fix our final destiny.

At length the soft little knuckles fell gently upon the rough boards, and the widow, answering the summons by throwing open the door, was startled at the appearance of her visitor; for a moment the two women stood staring into the face of each other.

Finally Nina, to relieve embarrassment, threw back the hood from her head.

"You are surprised to see me?" she asked.

"Oh, why, it's Mrs. Weatherbee! come right in! looks like it's going to rain some."

Taking the best chair and brushing it with the corner of her apron she bade her guest be seated,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

meanwhile making apologies for the untidiness of the house.

"Have you some work for me, Mrs. Weatherbee?" she asked.

"Yes, and no," Nina replied, seating herself. "I have come, Mrs. Hawley, to ask a favor of you; but first go on with your supper, the children are hungry and sleepy; when you have them in bed, we will talk alone."

"Yes, 'deed, they are hungry," the woman returned. "I've been kept late to-day where I was working."

The widow hurried through with the evening meal, and after huddling the little ones to their bed, came and seated herself beside her visitor.

It is not often that the misfortunes of one woman awakes the sympathies of another. Woman has had that aptitude of her being dwarfed at the expense of bestowing her boundless affection upon man.

In this case, however, it bridged the gap between two classes; they met upon the common ground of destitution and poverty.

After detailing the unhappy events of her married life to Mrs. Hawley, she continued, "I do not know why I came to you in this, my hour of trial; when I left my home, I had no more idea where I was going than your youngest child would have; my only thought was to get away from it all."

"Poor soul," the widow broke in, shaking her head.

"As I was crossing the Oil Creek bridge something

## "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

suggested you to me, and acting on the impulse I came here. When you worked at our house I formed a liking for you, you were so reserved, yet kind, and this encouraged me to believe you would take compassion on me.

"I want to stay here with you—how long I am unable to say, but long enough to make my plans for the future. I do not want my hiding place to be known; let me stay, Mrs. Hawley, and I will help you all I can."

"Sure I will, Mrs. Weatherbee, but this place is not fit for such fine folks as you be; course we don't have much, but you'll be mighty welcome to what we's got."

"Thank you, dear," Nina said, putting an arm around the good woman's shoulders. "You are very kind. Promise me, too, that you will tell no living being of my hiding place."

"Don't have no fear on that point, I tell you it will be a mighty slick one that gets anything out of me. But you best put on one of my print dresses, there's so many of the tony folks what pass here going to the refineries, and some one of them might suspect if they saw you with them 'ere clothes on, you know."

It was a night of repose to all under the widow's roof, except Nina; for her the excitement of the day and the anticipation of the morrow banished slumber.

In the morning she rose at an early hour, unrefreshed, but determined to make the best of everything around her; and when the widow appeared she

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

was delighted beyond measure to find breakfast ready, and the little room in a tidy condition.

The day passed uneventfully to all save the children, who remained quite shy under the management of their new mistress; and when at length evening arrived, and Mrs. Hawley returned from her day of hard toil, she found a new air of order about the house, and everything clean and cozy.

The smoke-bedimmed lamp chimney sparkled like a crystal as it gave form to the flame coming now from a well-trimmed wick, and the pans and kettles that had been allowed to lay in scattered profusion around the stove had been given a scouring, and looked like new as they reflected the shimmer of the firelight from their exalted position upon the wall.

The children with clean faces and well-combed hair, were seated in a row upon an old couch listening with dilated eyes and mouths to the wonderful exploits of "Jack and the Bean Stalk."

Poor Mrs. Hawley raised her hands in surprise; how such a change could be wrought in so short a time was beyond her comprehension. It was the first time since her husband's death that she came home to a clean house, and with supper ready, and the children laughing instead of crying.

"Well! well! well!" she exclaimed, throwing off her shawl, "who'd a thought that a fine lady like you could work like this? And I am completely fagged out, too, been washing carpets all day. La! but I

## "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

*am tired, and to think you got supper with your own pretty hands!"*

"It's a pleasure to know I have been able to make you happy," said Nina. "This is the first time I have been appreciated since my father died; I thought, Mrs. Hawley, that I was in trouble, but never till to-day have I been able to realize what poor people have to endure.

"I have thought of the sad circumstances which have made it necessary for you to leave these children alone here day by day, while you go out to earn them bread, and also of the extravagance of people who have wealth, and compared it with the struggle you have for a mere living.

"The happiness you get out of your life, and the fortitude with which you face your misfortunes, must come as a blessing from God to compensate for your actual misery and blind you to the wretchedness of your poverty."

"Them are Christian words sure, Mrs. Weatherbee; the Lord is mindful of his own. La! if it wasn't for my trust in Him, I'd go clean crazy pretty nigh half the time."

"Don't call me by that name again, Mrs. Hawley, I despise it. Call me Nina, or Miss Smedley. This may not be Christian, but I cannot help it, I left my name as well as my home."

"La! I don't blame you for that, I would never have such a man as he is compel me to carry his name; but I must tell you, there's a heap of talk

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

about you up town, and they're saying that you must have jumped in the river.

"One man's telling that he heered something go kaflop off one of the bridges last night, and now a lot of men are out with the cannons what the Standard Oil Company\* keeps, a shooting at the water to make you rise—just listen, they are shooting yet, can't you hear them?"

Just then the boom of a cannon rattled the sash, and Nina felt a chill creep through her.

"There's a heap of excitement sure 'nuff, but I was a thinkin' how they'd better save their powder."

"Oh, it is terrible, Mrs. Hawley, but I must not turn from my purpose—tell me, what are they saying about the Weatherbee's?"

"Everything you told me, Miss Smedley. They say that the husband of the poor thing has been drunk all the blessed day, and that when he came into the hotel, some old man by the name of Graham hit him right in the face and knocked him down.

"With a big swear word, he said, 'You—miserable pup, you just drove her to it; if this girl's gone and killed herself, I will choke the very gizzard out of you.'"

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\*When one of the Standard's large iron storage tanks catches fire from lightning or any cause, to protect adjacent property, a cannon ball is fired into the side of the tank. This allows the oil to escape into a large basin previously prepared, and from which the oil is consumed by the fire. This obviates the terrible destruction caused by the tank "boiling over," or exploding.

AUTHOR.

## "GOOD-BY, OLD HOME"

"Poor Mr. Graham," said Nina, placing the children at the table.

"You know who he is, then?" Mrs. Hawley asked.

Nina nodded, and remained silent throughout the meal.

Supper over, she soon had the dishes washed and put away, and then gathered the children around her.

"Now we will have another story," she said, "then you must go to bed."

At the mention of a story, they jumped with glee.

"Tell us 'Dack an a been talk' aden," said one; "Dat a dood tory," chorused the others.

"Now I'll just put them young uns to bed myself; you've just been doing 'nuff to-day," Mrs. Hawley said, overhearing them.

"Not to-night, dear. I am going to ask you to go up town for me, and while you are gone I will put them to bed."

"I would go *any* place for you," the widow returned earnestly.

After securing a pencil and paper, Nina wrote the following note, and intrusted it to her friend for safe delivery. "Remember, give it to no one but Mr. Graham."

It ran:

"DEAR FRIEND:—Do not worry about me, I am alive, and with God's people. For the present I do not want my place of concealment known, but believe me, your friend, NINA."

"It is ready now," she said, handing it to her messenger. "Come away, so soon as you put it in his hand."

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP

TEN years had passed since the rise and fall of that never-to-be-forgotten place of wild stampeding and blasted fortunes, Cherry Grove.

The oil industry was a youth no longer; the wild oats, as well as the wild-cats, had given way to the wiser judgment of maturity, and the business assumed a better and more substantial trend.

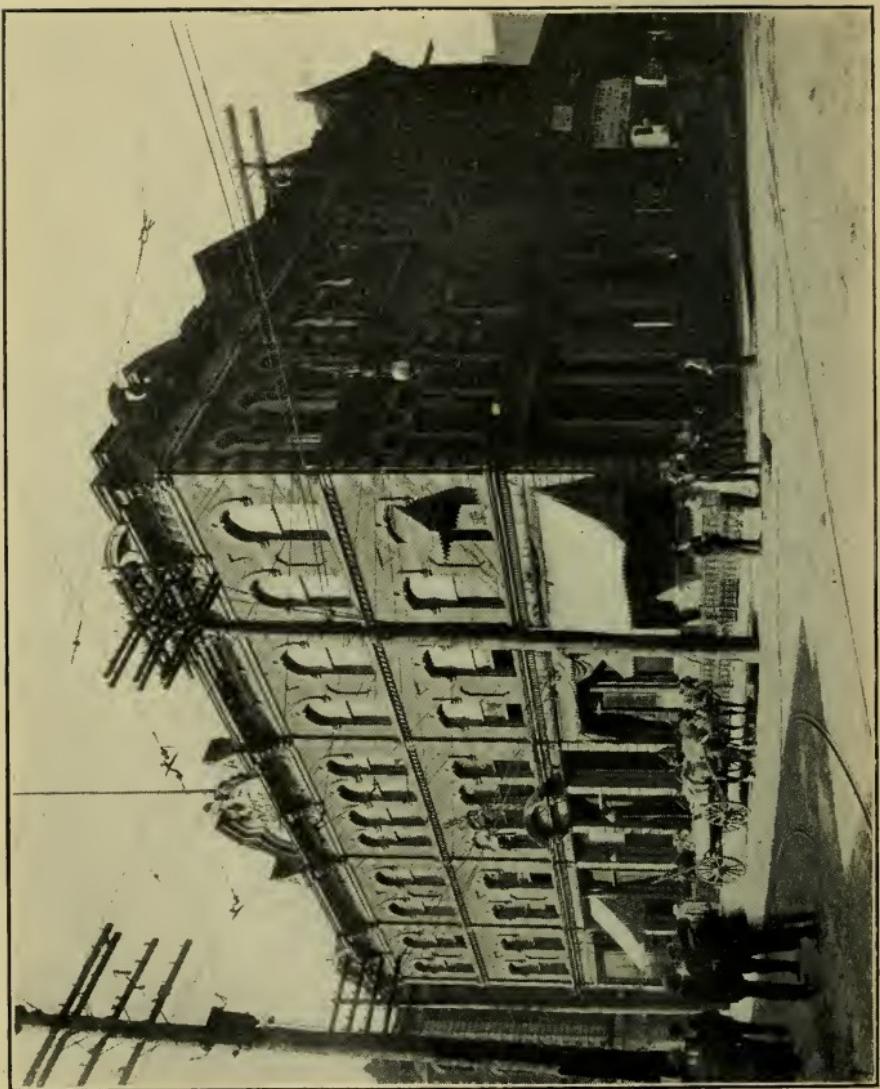
After a hard fought battle, the Standard succeeded in getting control of the oil market and proclaimed through their agent, Joseph Seep, that the price of oil would be governed by the natural law of supply and demand, instead of the uncertain floor of the Exchange.

The brokers tried hard to have this, their death blow, reconsidered; but Standard Oil, acting for a common good, paid no attention to their protests; the Exchange, with its record of broken homes and pauperized producers, had to go.

With the exception of a very few who played on the inside, no one made money on "wind oil," and many sighs of relief were given when, for a certainty, it was known that buying oil on margin was a thing of the past.

Members of the Exchange were forced to seek other vocations, and those who were stockholders in the





"Pass the Exchange to-day, with the exception of a farm wagon or two, you see nothing of a stir."

## THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP

building, and had other interests, fraternized themselves into an organization, which, on account of the death of the Exchange, was given the significant name of "Paresis Club."

Pass the Exchange to-day, and with the exception of a farm wagon or two hitched outside, you see nothing of a stir.

Peep inside, and if it happens to be a rainy day, you will see little groups scattered throughout the spacious room, playing cards, or telling the tales of palmy days when Johnny Steele, under the glossy title of "Coal Oil Johnny," appeared upon the streets of Philadelphia in a carriage of his own designing, and upon its sides in flaming colors the picture of a flowing oil well, and directly beneath in letters of gold his nom de plume, "Coal Oil Johnny, Oil Prince, and Prince of Spendthrifts."

Many of the producers who had gone to Ohio to investigate the new developments, came back disgusted.

"It is not oil at all," they would argue; "more like B. S.—more like anything than oil."

It had an odor worse than a garbage wagon on a July day, and bottles of the stuff were brought back and compared with the pale green aromatic product of the home field.

"No wonder the Standard don't want it," was a common comment. It was worth but fifteen cents a barrel, and could never hurt the Pennsylvania market.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

To the geologist, it was of great interest; to the chemists, it was a new prize, as it was of a different formation and found in a different kind of rock than that of all previous fields, having an asphalt instead of a paraffine base, and was rich in sulphides, hence the disagreeable odor.

It was found from twenty to eighty feet in the Trenton limestone, and while a thousand feet below the surface, it bore evidence of having been at one time the bed of an extinct ocean.

It was some time before Ohio oil gained recognition as an illuminant. Expert chemists were detailed by the Standard to determine its true value, and figure out a process by which the sulphides could be eliminated.

This accomplished, Trenton Rock Oil, the product of Ohio and Indiana, was placed upon the plane it enjoys to-day, and it was a better oil than at first estimated. "Lima Oil" jumped up, and proportionally, "Pennsylvania Oil" fell.

Besides the Jones farm, and with the hope that Ohio oil would amount to something, I "tied up" several pieces of prospective territory, holding them on a rental till such time as I would find it convenient to begin operations.

When "Ohio" was advanced there was a rush for territory, so I had nothing to do but wait the trend of developments.

From July 20, 1887, to March 6, 1890, the price of Lima oil at the wells was fifteen cents a barrel and

## THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP

during this time its value for illuminating purposes had not been established, as all attempts at refining the refractory product had proved abortive.

In May, 1892, two years after the Standard's chemical experts had exalted the stuff to the dignity of an illuminating oil, I concluded to drill a test well upon my "block."

Since my first visit to the home of my friend Jones—for indeed we had become great friends—I never visited Ohio without going to see them, and as excitement was rife, and he had grown tired of the expectancy, he urged me to go ahead and drill.

The productive areas of the Buck Eye field were in spots, and not knowing whether my stuff was on a dry or wet one I concluded to take a chance, reasoning that if it proved dry it would end the rental, which at the end of each year was quite a sum.

Anxious to procure as much territory as possible before taking the final plunge, I looked around in hope of finding a farm or two that I might add to my other leases.

The farm just north of me, I was told, had been leased by an Oil City man named Weatherbee. Rumor had it that he had failed in business trying to "buck the Standard," and would probably sell his right for a mere pittance.

I had not seen Weatherbee since the night I was chairman of the "Shut Down Movement" meeting, but at the time, as I have said, I did not know him, nor that it was the same slick rascal who had years

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

before defrauded the widow Martin by a devilish scheme which culminated in my father's death.

As I became a recognized producer my associates were naturally from that fraternity, some of them veterans from Oil Creek and Bradford, who knew every man that had ever drilled a well.

In this way I learned much of my father's early career, as well as of the man Smedley, whose daughter I had loved from earliest childhood.

Whether Weatherbee had familiarized himself with my identity I did not know; however, I determined not to make myself known unless he recognized me, and there were many John Paynes in the oil country.

It was Friday, June 3d, when I arrived in Oil City.

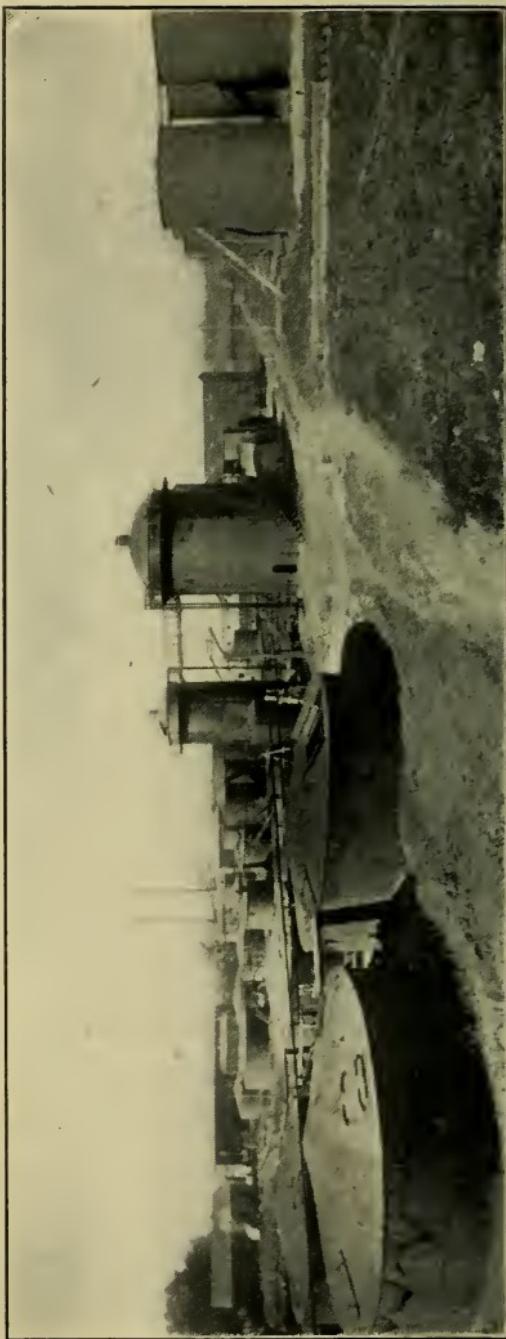
As I neared the city, naturally, I thought of the girl who, though belonging to another, would always be my idol.

Through the years of separation I had continued to love her—there was no power on earth that could keep me from loving her. I loved her as the violets love the shadows, as roses the sun; it was a natural love, the love of true companionship.

I knew too that I was wrong in loving the wife of another, but my love was pure—in fact, all the goodness I possessed I credited to her memory and the influence of my mother.

At the hotel I inquired for Weatherbee's quarters, and the clerk, with a queer smile, replied that most anywhere under the heavens would be apt to catch him.





*Refinery at Marcus Hook, Pa.—One of the many independents.*

## THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP

"Don't see much of him around since he went defunct," he added; "the fellow hasn't a friend in the town."

"I am unable to imagine Weatherbee a bankrupt," I replied. "He was an exceedingly shrewd business man."

"Wasn't shrewd enough to buck Standard Oil, though."

"I didn't hear any of the particulars."

"Well, there isn't much to it," he went on; "Weatherbee began under-selling the Standard at Philadelphia and New York; his scheme was to have them call a halt, and take him and his plant into the 'trust.'

"It wasn't long, however, till he found other oils coming in at a price way below his, and of course people bought where they could buy the cheapest; so Weatherbee, to sell his oil, had to come down to the lowest price.

"Finding this wouldn't do, he shifted to Baltimore, Chicago and Cleveland, and placed his oil on the market of these cities on a par with other oil.

"There was no land talk or fuss, but strange enough, refined oil went up again in Philadelphia and New York, and fell in Baltimore, Chicago and Cleveland.

"He then tried to worm an under-test oil into these cities that he might compete with the unseen enemy, but this was the first symptom of the man losing his head.

"The explosion of a lamp, killing a woman and her child, led to an investigation, and the dealer who

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

was handling the Weatherbee Oil was closed up by the Government.

"Weatherbee now looked around with desperation, and tried to consolidate all the Independents, but failed. He could not grasp the situation; the man hitherto so successful, was bewildered and puzzled.

"Other Independent refineries were flourishing and thriving, Oil Creek's borders were lined with them.

"At Oil City were the Independent Refining Co., Penn Refining Co., Continental Refining Co., Crystal Oil Works, Germania Refining Co.; Reno was supporting the plant of the Empire Oil Works; Titusville had the American Oil Works, Titusville Oil Works, Penn. Paraffine Co.

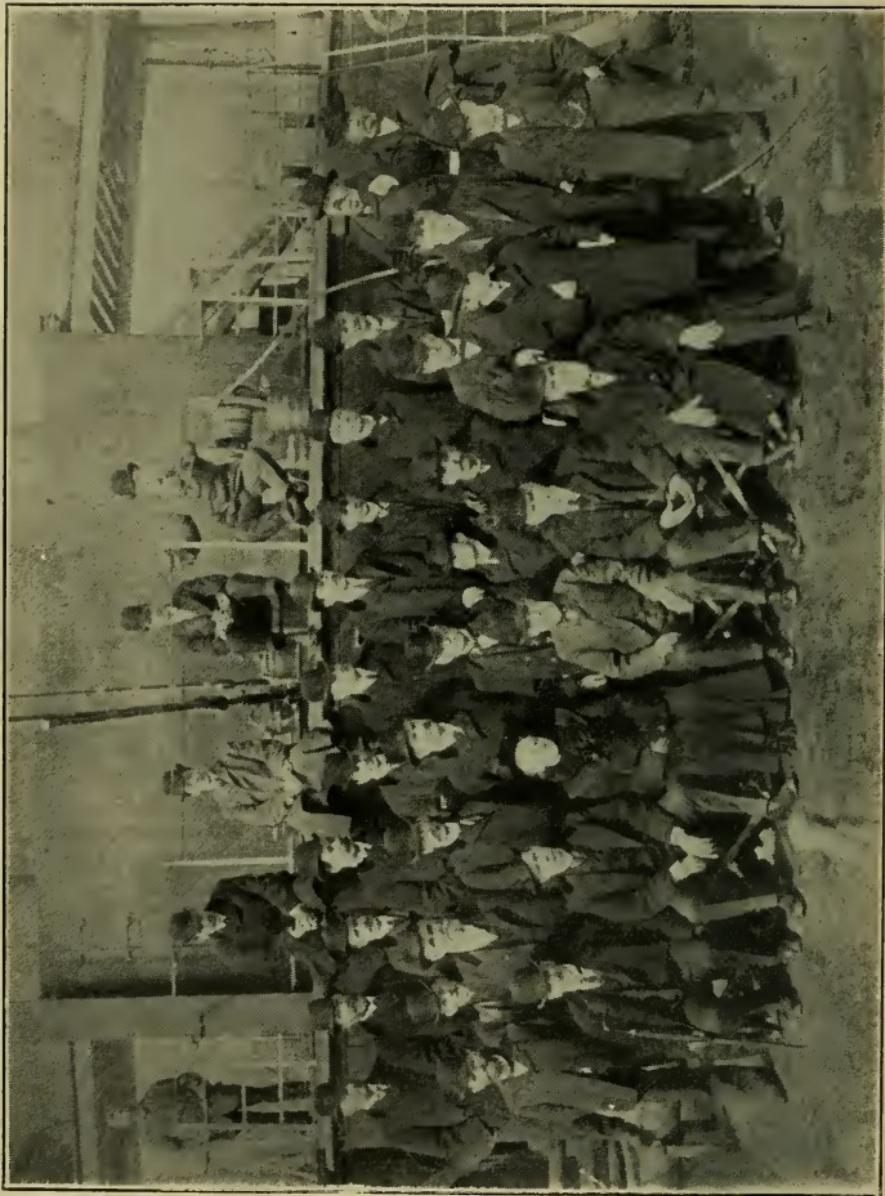
"Warren looked with pride upon her successful independent refineries, which were the Wilberine Oil Co., Seneca Oil Co., North Warren Refining Co., Cornplanter Refining Co., Glade Oil Works, and United Refining Co.

"Then at Clarendon the Tiona Refining Co. and Levi Smith Refining Co. were going ahead just as though there was no Standard Oil Company at all. What could it mean? Why was his the only unsuccessful Independent plant, when so many were flourishing?

"Again he looked around. At Bradford was Lew Emery's master plant, running in harmony with the Independent Kendall Refining Co., and at Emlenton, Pa., was the Emlenton Refining Co., turning out their hundreds of barrels of independently refined oil each day, while Pittsburg, Karns City, Marcus



A group of independent refiners. Notwithstanding the popular belief that Standard Oil has no competition, these men have, without an exception, been successful.



## THE LOVE OF TRUE COMPANIONSHIP

Hook, and Wellsville, N. Y., were in the list for a number of excellent plants.\* Ohio was full of them too, and all doing an unmolested business. It was his methods, not his business, which aroused the spirit of antagonism in the Standard.

"If you want to see him, you will probably find him at the plant just above town on the creek, as he is tearing it down and selling the material for junk—it's all he has left."

As the well-informed clerk had presumed, I found my man giving orders to a gang of men who were cutting away at the iron pillars.

I came directly to the point, and asked him the value he placed on the Snyder Farm in Ohio.

Evidently, in his desperation, he had forgotten all about it; but so soon as I told him I wished to buy he was immediately on the alert for a deal.

"I will look it up, and let you know to-morrow at two o'clock; where can I see you?"

"At the Arlington Hotel," I replied.

"Very well, expect me at two sharp."

I nodded, and walked away, resolving to look up my friend Graham before leaving.

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\*There were also the following additional independent concerns: *Pittsburg, Pa.*—Waverly Oil Works, A. D. Miller & Sons, Refineries. *Freedom, Pa.*—Freedom Oil Works. *Corryopolis, Pa.*—Pittsburg Refining Co. *Cleveland, Ohio*—Natl. Refining Co. *Finley, Ohio*—Natl. Refining Co. *Marietta, Ohio*—Natl. Refining Co. *Toledo, Ohio*—Paragon Refining Co. *Constable Hook, N. J.*—Columbian Oil Co. *Edgewater, N. J.*—A. D. Ellis & Sons.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE IRISH POET.

THE attempt of Weatherbee to assume a little of his old-time authoritative manner, was pitiable indeed.

As he turned from me to give his attention to the men he had employed to tear down the remains of his refinery, I could think of nothing but a vanquished lion who, looking at the iron bars thrust suddenly before him, bows in submission, but inwardly asks who it was that dared to confine his giant strength.

He was the same Weatherbee of years ago, except that his hair was gray. His face was unwrinkled, but lines, destined to become furrows, had been drawn, and I reasoned the cause lay in the decadence of his handsome fortune.

When I returned to the hotel, the clerk asked if I had succeeded in finding my man. Assuring him that I had, I inquired the whereabouts of my friend Graham, describing him as he remained in my memory since our accidental meeting at the Exchange.

With closed eyes and drawn lips, he studied awhile, as if facial contortion was necessary when viewing the past; then, with a sudden relaxation he asked, "Do you mean the old fellow whom they called the 'Lion of the Exchange?'"

## THE IRISH POET

"Possibly," I replied, "It has been some time since I have seen him."

"Tall old fellow?"

"Quite; had rather angular features."

"Yes, same fellow. Oh, he's been dead some time now; mighty fine old gentleman—yes, I mind him well, he was one of our regular guests, fact he died here."

"Strange I didn't hear of it," I returned awkwardly, for I knew there was no one now that could tell me what I craved to know regarding the woman I loved.

"What was the cause of his death?" I asked, to relieve the reverie into which I felt I was falling.

"No one seemed to know, the doctors even were puzzled; a number of his friends think it was brought on by the sudden disappearance of young Weatherbee's wife, but of course, that was mere conjecture."

"You don't mean the son of the Weatherbee I have just been to see?" I felt a nervous, or rather emotional shudder thrill every fiber of my being, and to stay the crisis I stepped to the cigar case and purchased a cigar, which I lighted.

"His wife?" I asked, leaning against the counter so that my face was partly turned from him.

"Yes," he replied with emphasis.

"Where did she go?" I asked this in a tone that would lead him to believe I was curious only as one naturally would be at the sudden disappearance of any person.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"That's a mystery, Mr. Payne," he replied, looking at the register to insure that he had called me by my right name. "No one could ever find out. Graham, so rumor had it, looked upon her as his own child, and when she had gone without so much as confiding in him, he worried and fretted himself into the sickness which ultimately resulted in his death.

"Before he died he made a will leaving all the property to her, providing she was ever found, and if at the expiration of twenty years nothing could be heard from her his estate was to go to some hospital in charge of the Sisters of Mercy."

"Very generous," I added, blowing a cloud of smoke from me.

"After his death," he continued, "a slip of paper was found in his room which recalled an event of the night after her disappearance. The first conclusion was, that she had committed suicide; Graham was like a madman; his denunciations of the Weatherbees was most bitter. During the excitement her husband happened into the hotel somewhat intoxicated, and Graham flew at him like a mad bull and knocked him down.

"'You damn miserable cur,' he said, 'you drove her to it! clear out, or I'll strangle the life out of you!'"

"Good for Graham!" I broke in, my heart thumping like a trip hammer in admiration for the man who had felled the tormentor of my Nina.

"Well, as I was going to say," the clerk continued, "that night an old woman came to the hotel and

## THE IRISH POET

asked for Mr. Graham. He was pacing up and down when she came in, and Mr. Kelly, who was in the office at that time, pointed him out to her. ‘Are you Mr. Graham?’ she asked, approaching him. ‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘what can I do for you?’ ‘Here’s a note,’ she said, and thrusting a paper into his hands vanished before he had time to open it.

“He never said a word, but it was rumored that he had detectives trying to locate both the old lady and the missing woman, but without success.”

“What was the slip of paper you found?” I asked.

“It was a note signed ‘Nina,’ and told him not to worry, that she was with God’s people.”

At this moment some arrivals came in from a recent train putting an end to our conversation, and as it would be some time before supper, I concluded to walk out and think it all over.

Crossing the river to the south side of the city, I walked leisurely down West First Street that I might, if nothing more, see the home in which she used to live, and where I had joined with a crowd in wishing her a merry Christmas, the night she left the sleigh and ran up the steps.

“Had I known at that time whom she was,” I thought, “all might be different now. Ah, fickle fate, many are the crimes laid at your door.”

I loved to think of her, because I believed that God intended us for each other. I loved to be where I knew she had been, and tread the ground upon which I knew her feet had stepped.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Reaching the house, it looked ghostly and desolate. The shutters were closed, dry leaves were scattered upon the porch, the lawn grass stood high and rank; save the sparrows that twittered about the eaves, there was no sign of life about.

Upon one of the pillars of the porch in large, ugly letters was a sign, "FOR SALE." I walked around the house with the air of a man contemplating the purchase of such a property.

"Oh, Nina, my lost love," I soliloquized; "if there is a God in heaven, surely He will bring you to me; how happy it would make me to bring you back to this, your old home."

I contrasted this deserted palace with the little rough board house of years ago; and while thus musing, an old gentleman came down the walk from the barn.

"Are ye thinking uv buying the place?" he asked in an unmistakable Irish brogue.

"I may," I answered.

"Well, begorra, ye'll niver git the loikes of sich a bargain agin, it's deart chape, but shure it's goin' to rack and ruin."

"You're looking after it, are you?" I asked.

"Well, yis, the kids wouldn't lave a windy in it, if thar wasn't some one to kape them away, the spalpeens!"

"Who owns it?" I inquired further.

"The Lord only knows, I don't, but it's the sharif what's got me here."

## THE IRISH POET

"What's become of the young Weatherbee who used to occupy it?"

"The devil take him, he's around town spungin' off everybody. Ach! he's the blackguard, shure and I knows the whole thrice of 'em—used to dig conductor holes for his skinflint of an auld father down in Clarion County yares ago."

"Perhaps you knew my father too; he used to drill for Weatherbee in Clarion County."

"Phat wus his name?"

"Payne—Tom Payne."

"Tom Payne! you don't mane to till me ye air the son of Tom Payne who wus burnt to dith on the auld 'Nilly' well?"

"I certainly am."

"Well, for the love of the Saints, who'd ever have thought it? dade and you're a bigger man than your father wuz."

"What is your name? I am glad to meet any one who knew my father," I said extending my hand.

"Roach—M. J. Roach."

"Not the distinguished poet, surely?"

"And shure and it's me."

"Well, Mr. Roach, I have heard of you many times; your witty ballads have made you very popular throughout the oil fields."

"Ye aught to huv heer'd the wun I gave to auld Weatherbee when he tried to arginize the Producer's Protective Associashun. Listen and I'll show you how it started.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"The Producers' Protective Associashun  
Is nothing but a blind  
For catching little fishes,  
Without aither hook or line;  
As they marched along togither,  
A lookin' mighty fine,  
With their pickadilly collars,  
And long peaked ears behind.

"Shure the auld thafe that I wus talkin' thru me hat, but look at him now.

"Loike an eagle he duse floiy,  
From grocer-e to grocer-i.

"Yaw, yaw."

"That is clever, Mr. Roach, but what do you mean by the 'long peaked ears behind'?"

He gave me a slap on the shoulder, and giving vent to a jolly laugh said, "Why ivery wun of them what joined his auld associashun wus a jackass, but that wouldn't do in the poitry, ye know; 'long peaked ears behind' is better."

"You have both truth and poetry in that, Mr. Roach—tell me what became of young Weatherbee's wife, some one told me she disappeared very suddenly and mysteriously."

"The Holy Vargin protect her, shure nobody knows; dade and she was the broth uv a gurl too, her phather got swamped at the Exchange, auld skinflint did it."

"Has no one ever heard where she might be?"

"Divil a wun; the young omathawn got a divorce shortly after and married a brazen huzzy that soon put the claner on him, but it sarved him right!"

## THE IRISH POET

"Here, take this," I said handing him a dollar,  
"and write off that poem for me."

"I can't write meself, but rist aisy, I'll hav it for  
ye."

Going to my room in the hotel, I sat down and tried  
to reason it all to a logical conclusion.

"Where could she be? Was she living or dead?"  
I recalled the words of Mr. Graham, "Don't give up  
the ship."

Had she married again, or was she still free—Free!  
I was afraid to believe it, but at the very thought a  
peculiar sense of happiness came over me, which  
made my heart beat with the joy of expectancy.

I could not sit still, but walked the floor in nervous  
anxiety. Nina, my Nina, free from the ties that had  
bound her to that miserable whelp.

After supper I telegraphed my foreman in McKean  
County, asking what progress was being made with  
the well in which we were drilling a pocket? One of  
my wells had gotten into the habit of "running in,"  
and to protect the sand from getting choked, I ordered  
a deep pocket drilled to serve as a catch basin for the  
floating sand, and just before retiring, he wired me  
that a fourth sand had been discovered, and quite  
rich in a grade of oil similar to what we were getting  
from the old third.

Immediately I went to the *Derrick* office,\* and in-  
quired for the particulars.

The report had it that the accidental discovery of

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\* Official organ of the oil industry.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

oil in a fourth "pay" would once more resuscitate the drill in the Bradford field.

As the shades of evening began to fall the sky took on a dark frown from which flashes of pale lightning were reflected. The air grew humid, and seeing a storm was threatening I returned to the hotel; by eight o'clock the rain began to fall, first in heavy, thinly scattered drops, and pulling my chair to the door I watched, as did many others, the great globules fall and spatter upon the pavements in front.

Gradually the rain increased till it was falling in great sheets and soon was ankle deep on the sidewalks. Wind now arose and the storm which had been pending began to rage with increasing violence. Lightning flashed in the very streets, accompanied with simultaneous reports of sharp thunder, and it was long after midnight before the fury of the elements subsided.

It was late in the afternoon of the following day before Weatherbee and I came to terms regarding the lease, as he wanted to sell it to me "pig-in-the bag" style, but I refused to have anything to do with it unless I could examine what I wanted to buy.

He finally yielded, and looking over the well-worded article of agreement I was able at once to understand his reluctance, as it was another of those trick leases which have done more to condemn the oil man in the eyes of the farmer than any other one thing.

I said nothing, but paid the price we finally agreed on, but determined in my mind to change the terms of the lease before putting a well on it.

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*“The horror of horrors.”*

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE HORROR OF HORRORS

THE railroads had suffered so from washouts that when it came time for me to leave the city I found myself compelled to remain over another night.

I did not mind this as my trip had been a successful one, and with the additional lease to annex to my Jones block—the block in which I had acquired so much faith, what matter if I did have to wait another day or two?

I felt a certain charm in loitering around the city which had endeared itself to me by being the home of the woman I loved better than my own life.

Returning to the hotel I telegraphed my contractor in Ohio the result of my trip, instructing him to lose no time in ordering a rig and to begin operations so soon as it was completed.

Oil operators, with scarcely an exception, have a great many superstitions when it comes to locating their wells; especially is this true when new territory is to be tested.

Dreams, the witch hazel fork, clairvoyance, and many such mysterious agencies have played no little part in influencing the anxious producer as to where he shall drive the stake for the first well; then, if his hopes are realized, the agency becomes his fixed faith.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

My experience in McKean County had led me to associate woods with big wells, and big wells with woods; as a matter of fact all the big wells of McKean County were in the woods.

This created in my mind a little superstition of my own—that my first well should be drilled in the woods; so accordingly I instructed my man to drive the stake in the clump at the rear of the big barn.

This done, and nothing else to do beyond waiting for a train to speed me back to Ohio, I naturally renewed my friendship with the hotel clerk, in hope of eliciting more information regarding the mysterious disappearance of Mrs. Weatherbee, for I had resolved to find her at any cost.

As gentle reminders of the night's storm several sun showers occurred throughout the day, intervened by periods of sunny skies which coaxingly lured back the moisture to the fleecy clouds, lazily floating upon the bosom of the air.

As the sun kissed the occident, dark clouds were seen to gather and spread out over a burst of beautiful colors which fanned outward from the declining rays to tip the dark frown of the tempest with the silver of expiring day. Then, as if maddened by the gentle touch, the storm king struck his lightning arm across his darkened brow, and growled in an undertone till the last ray had melted beneath his blackened glare.

The night then spread her sable mantle over the heavens, and the cloud-pent storm, hampered no

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

longer with the loving warmth of the sun, broke anew into its fury, and re-enacted the celestial drama of the night before.

It was late when I retired, the clerk and I having spent the evening at the Ivy Club, and diligently I had endeavored to learn from him more of Nina's whereabouts, but it was useless; he had told me all he knew. Having nothing to do until traffic was resumed, I was in no hurry to arise the next morning.

It was Sunday, June 5, 1892. The day which stands out in oil country history as one which cast the shadow of death and desolation over the entire region.\*

Propping myself high on the pillows after procuring a book from my traveling bag, I fell to reading that pretty story of "Stringtown on the Pike."†

Through the window of my room I had a glimpse of a long, perpendicular hill, "The Hog Back," which rose abruptly from the west side of Oil Creek.

From the position of my bed I was unable to see what was going on below, but suddenly I became

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\* In the description of the fire and flood which I weave into this chapter of my story, I recount the events as they actually happened; but as I approach the task I would fain lay down my pen and say no more, for that horrible scene, where hundreds lost their lives, would stagger the pen of a Milton.

To Mr. P. C. Boyle who kindly furnished me with the data of that awful catastrophe, I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness.

AUTHOR.

† To my friend, Professor John Uri Lloyd, whose pathetic story of "Stringtown" inspired the writing of this, "Oil Wells in the Woods."

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

aware that all was not right; so with book in hand I left the bed and stepped to the window.

Looking out, I beheld an excited throng scattered along the creek's border, watching the water which was running bank high and bearing away all kinds of debris, while a gorge of drift had accumulated at the bridge and was threatening to push the structure from its abutments.

I had not watched the scene long till I saw that the waters were rising rapidly, and would soon be into the streets. Hurrying into my clothes I ran down and joined the crowd of curious spectators. Few people were upon the streets, as it was during church hours.

Perceptibly the water was ascending the retaining wall, which rose several feet above the level of the pavements. At length the top was reached; then pausing a minute, the flood leaped to the other side and spread relentlessly into the door yards; and not caring to get my feet wet, I was about to return to my hotel, when a man from the Pipe Line office came rushing down the sidewalk to where we were, and gave warning to make ready for an awful disaster.

"For God's sake, men," he cried, waving his arms to attract the crowd, "hurry up the flats and rescue the people from their houses; the old pond freshet reservoir above Titusville has given way, and the water is sweeping down upon us as it did at Johnstown; over a hundred are reported lost at Titusville —come, boys, we have no time to lose."

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

Turning, he dashed away, throwing his arms as a signal to follow; and intuitively taking up his cry to "hurry," I rushed after him, the crowd hard upon our trail.

Deeper and deeper grew the water about us, but the cries of distress coming from the submerged flats rendered us unmindful of everything but the lives who were calling frantically for succor.

Reaching the most dependent portion, we found the water too deep to accomplish anything without the aid of boats. Others who had preceded us were hard at work. Sections of floating sidewalks had been converted into life-saving rafts, and men were struggling like heroes to rescue the women and children from the second story windows of their deluged homes.

A line of box cars, half submerged upon one of the tube mill tracks was the goal of safety from whence the sufferers were taken over a line of sheds to a place of refuge.

The number of brave fellows, many of whom are now sleeping under a monument dedicated to the heroes of the fire and flood, and whom I saw deliberately risking their lives to save others, stimulated me to a courage that no previous argument could have convinced me I possessed.

The water over the main bed of the stream was running like a Niagara, and barns and sheds were being swept away, to add more to the threatening gorge at the bridge.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Seeing a car loaded with lumber, I kicked off the tie boards and began the construction of a raft; and while I worked a man came to my side and without a word fell to assisting me. I glanced at him as he passed a board to me, and saw it was my friend from the hotel.

By this time the water had invaded the second stories of the houses, driving the hapless inmates to the roofs of their dwellings, and from the gable window of one which stood in close proximity to the main stream came the cries of a mother who, holding her baby above the water, implored some one to save her child.

The building from its buoyancy was swaying and threatening every minute to topple into the main channel. With a long piece of pipe I manned my raft to her, but in spite of all persuasions, she refused to leave.

"Take the baby, sir," she pleaded, "I cannot leave my father; he is ill, and the water will soon be above his bed."

Yielding to her piteous entreaties I took the tiny morsel of humanity, and placing it between my feet that it would not roll off, I succeeded in reaching the cars.

Leaving the raft he was constructing, my friend came to the cars, and willingly relieved me of my tiny burden.

"Good boy!" he exclaimed, reaching down and taking the child from me; "you hurry back, and so

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

soon as I can land the ‘kid’ over the sheds, I will come back and help you to save the other two.”

I had covered nearly half the distance to the house when suddenly the structure shot upward; the underpinning had given way, and as it settled back the little house gave a few whirls and rolled into the maddening surge.

Over and over it tumbled, then sinking, nothing but the roof was seen above the surface; while unmindful of everything, I stood like a man of stone—the very blood seemed frozen in my veins.

That wild and frantic lifting of arms, eyes terror driven from their very sockets, that awful cry of anguish which came from the doomed mother, calling “Good-by” to her baby, will haunt me to the day of my death. For a time I remained mute—it was enough to make the strongest heart grow sick.

The clerk of the hotel returned in time to see it all, and from his position was able to realize my peril, for unconsciously I was allowing my raft to drift toward the swift water; but his cry brought me to my senses, and seeing it would be impossible to save myself if I remained on the raft I jumped into the water and, thanks to my early training along the old Clarion river, was soon within reach of the long pole he thrust out to me.

The water now was nearly to the top of the cars, and would soon have them covered.

“Great God! man, what was the matter with you, I thought you were a goner; we have no time now

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

for meditating, come, let's get one of the boats, they have just arrived with a load," said my companion.

As he spoke I could not help mentally contrasting the apparently weak, polite, and perfumed clerk with the wiry and fearless youth who nearly dislocated my shoulder with the grip by which he pulled me from the water. Meantime horses had been dispatched to the club houses above the city on the river for the boats, and having returned we hastened to where they were being unloaded, and laying hold of one dragged it down the slope to the water.

By this time the flood wave was full upon us, and the wailing of frightened children, the cries of frantic women and the shout of frenzied men rose disconsolately above its awful roar.

Into the muddy water we pushed our little craft, as there could be no discipline in the face of such wild excitement, and unmindful of all else about us we struck out to save as many as it would be possible to under such strenuous conditions.

As if to lend awe to the scene heavy clouds darkened the sky, the wind rose, and again the heavens let loose, precipitating another deluge; but unmindful, back and forth we went, each time paying a ransom of fierce struggling for the souls we redeemed from inevitable destruction.

Not a word passed between us; mechanically and with aching hearts we plied our life-saving craft in and out among the floating wreckage, and here and there we could see, rising and falling upon the merci-

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

less tide, the bodies of the Titusville victims who had been carried along on the crest of the flood.

My friend was the first to break the silence between us. "Look there, Mr. Payne," he said, pointing toward a submerged dwelling, "see that bunch?"

I turned my eyes in the direction indicated, and saw a group of women and children huddled together upon the comb of the roof which was all that remained out of the water.

In an instant we were bearing down upon them, but at intervals the wind would catch the water, and for a time obscure them in the spray.

Before reaching the house my companion sat down in the bow, and with outstretched arm waited patiently to lay hold of the roof; but owing to its pitch having been made slippery by the rain and flood we swung in under the gable; then, picking up the mooring chain, he jumped with the agility of a cat to the roof.

"Keep your heads now," I heard him say, "and we'll land you ashore all right." Then, sitting astride the projecting roof, he drew the chain taut to form a life line; then with the coolness of an old mariner he instructed them to edge sideways to where I could reach them, and one by one I lifted them into the boat which threatened every time one stepped in, to turn over.

"Now, old man," he said, "you pull for the shore; that skiff is full enough for safety, and besides, you are not the only one of this crowd who can swim."

Throwing in the chain he gave the boat a push

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

with his feet, then jumping into the water laid hold of the stern, and using his legs as propellers, towed us toward the shore.

We had covered but a short distance of the way back when suddenly there appeared upon the surface a heavy film of oil, and following this the fumes of naphtha arose like a blue steam till the air grew stifling and choky.

In an instant the horror of what was soon to follow dawned upon me. For the first time the chill of fear shook every fiber of my being, and I trembled like an aspen leaf from head to foot.

"My God, Payne, don't give up now!"

I heard the voice of my friend who was still striving with might and main to push the boat ahead, and his cry aroused me to renewed strength.

Again I thought of the inevitable horror, for I knew the long line of refineries above had all been wrecked, and their thousands of barrels of oil and naphtha had been added to make the hellishness more complete.

Relief for the balance of the sufferers was now hopeless; and despair clutched the soul of every man when the deadly naphtha appeared upon the water.

The rain was now descending in torrents, lashing the gaseous liquid into a state of dangerous agitation, and lightning hissed out of the darkness and flashed athwart the path of the oils; and having a thorough knowledge of the nature of these volatile products,

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

I shuddered in contemplating the possibility of their becoming ignited.

From the banks, where hundreds stood as curious spectators, I could hear men imploring the people to take to the hills.

Looking over my shoulder to measure the distance ashore, the haze was so dense I could see nothing, and I pictured my mother's grief should I not get out alive. Then came that inexplicable converging of mind, which, when the fear of sudden death is impending, centers its whole power in a single ray upon those who love us best, and those to whom our affections cling.

The past events of my life swept like a flash across my mind; the picture faded, and from the panorama of familiar scenes, came the form of my beloved Nina; then the dream of my boyhood, and a subtle influence urged me to double my efforts.

The pungent atmosphere made my breath labored, and I noticed that my friend, too, was relaxing his efforts, and I felt it was now my time to lend a word of encouragement.

"Hang on, old man," I exclaimed, "you will soon be able to touch bottom"; but he made no reply, except to look woefully at me. Up to this time, I had paid no attention to the two women and children. Motionless they kept their seats, and with bent heads prayed in an undertone for our safety.

Suddenly we heard a low tremulous rumbling, followed by an explosion which shook the very earth,

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

and leaning upon my oars I turned my eyes in the direction from whence it seemed to come, and again I felt myself quaking with fright.

My worst fears were a horrible reality, for far above us the naphtha had caught fire from an engine attempting to cross the bridge, and with the rapidity of wind and flood the terrible flames were bearing down upon us, and my struggles, at first so full of hope, now relaxed to feeble efforts when inevitable doom seemed to claim us.

Notwithstanding the frenzy of my mind I resigned myself to the will of God, imploring His mercy, and as I turned my gaze from the shadow of approaching death my eyes met those of the woman seated before me.

My God! it was Nina—my lost Nina!

With the strength of a Hercules I now bent upon the oars and at last when the boat hit upon the bank brave fellows who had watched our perilous and disheartening approach snatched up the children and started up the hill, bidding us make haste and follow.

For a time a severe gust of wind held the fire at bay. Seizing Nina by the arm, we hurried up the slope and into one of the shelving streets of the side hill, just as the explosion, which filled the whole valley with flame, occurred.

Tired and exhausted, we reached a place of safety, and with the throng who had preceded us, fell upon our knees and joined in the prayers that were being offered for the entombed ones below.

## THE HORROR OF HORRORS

People living on the heights, who as yet had heard nothing of the flood below, believed, as they saw the flame and smoke rise to the sky, that the day of judgment had surely come.

Mothers, in wild supplication, were praying for sons or husbands who were among the missing, while husbands prayed for absent wives, and children, in frantic shrieks, called piteously for their parents.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

I KNOW of no language potent enough to portray the horror of that awful scene.

With the rain pouring down as though the flood-gates of heaven were thrown wide open, and with lightning flashing from every quarter of that blackened canopy of sky and smoke; with the unearthly roar of thunder as it rose at intervals above the hiss of a thousand tongues of fire; with the din of wild confusion which went up in anguished appeals beseeching God's mercy—all, all defy my pen—would to God I could blot it forever from my memory!

It was where earth and sky had sent forth their elements to engage in deadly conflict, and in mid-air, as if jealous of the other's might, they clashed together in a struggle so fearful, that strong men turned pale and trembled at the terrible sight.

Like a statue I stood, with eyes fixed upon those seething billows of flame and smoke, rolling high above the hills to receive the forked flash into their hellish crest. Then, with the scorching heat reflected from my face I turned my gaze into the valley from whence we had just emerged, and there behind that fiery curtain I pictured the madness and despair of the ones who were caught in that trap of death, and

## AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

growing sick at heart closed my eyes and prayed—but not for myself.

Unmindful of the manifold voices which rose in grief and prayer for the entombed ones below, I remained like a statue—a nerveless spectator to the greatest disaster ever recorded upon the pages of oil country history.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon before the fury of the fire flood was spent. Then, as the water and ruins gave up their dead, and the charred and contused victims, regardless of rank or station in life, were brought forth and placed by willing hands side by side for identification, the shrieks of heart-broken women mingled with the smothering groans of men as loved ones were recognized along that ghastly line, caused the hardest heart to swell and throb with pity.

The houses of the lowlands had all been consumed; not a single street remained intact, and where majestic buildings had stood but a few hours before, nothing remained but a tangled waste of hideous ruins.

If the first scene of that fearful tragedy was awful, the second was surely pathetic and sorrowful, for here, there—everywhere, lay the dead, many incinerated beyond all human resemblance.

The body of Weatherbee was found amid the wreckage of his disrupted refinery. His face was scarred and swollen; his hands, charred to a crisp, clenched one of the beams, as if in his death struggle he would fain hold back the last of his earthly possessions.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

Over his selfish and dishonest career let the mantle of charity kindly fall, and He who doeth all things best, be merciful to him.

It was late that night before the first train left the city. The depot, as well as other public buildings, had been given to shelter the homeless.

After several hours of diligent searching my hotel friend and myself succeeded in finding the scattered children of Mrs. Hawley who, with Nina, awaited our return at the station.

I said nothing to my friend regarding my discovery, indeed it was hard to realize why such a chain of events had brought me to Oil City to terminate in my saving the woman—the only woman it was possible for me to love.

Varied and strange are the incidents of life. We are but children of Fate, cast adrift on the sea of hope, to rise or fall upon the ever-changing waves of environment, to be caught at last in the gulf stream which destroys our hopes, and sweeps us away to the shoals of disappointment.

"Good-night, old man," I said to my friend as we parted at the station, "you go and get some rest. I am going to take these two women and children home with me."

"Good-night," he returned, and shaking hands with each, started for his hotel.

Following him to the door, we stepped outside together, and again I grasped his hand.

"You do not know what my feelings are toward

*"Where majestic buildings had stood a few hours before, nothing remained but a tangled waste of ruins."*





## AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

you," I said, looking earnestly into his face. "Tell me your name, I wish to remember you."

"King, Percy King," he replied courteously, and reluctantly I released his hand. "Good-night, Mr. King," I said, "I shall never forget you."

Watching him till he disappeared in the dense crowd, I turned and went back to where Nina and Mrs. Hawley were with the children.

Meantime the tracks had been repaired, and the first train steamed out as the steeple clocks were pealing the hour of midnight.

With my little party I left the ill-fated city in all its wretchedness to the care and gentler touch of that noble band, "The Sisters of Mercy," who were soon upon the scene.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when we walked from the train to my home in Bradford. Notwithstanding the early hour my mother was up, and surprised me by an immediate response to my ring.

In the excitement we had forgotten our appearance. Our faces had been blackened by the smoke; our clothes were wet and muddy, and with the wailing children we looked a sorry lot.

"For heaven's sake, John!" she exclaimed, raising her hands in astonishment, "What does it all mean?"

"I had business in Oil City," was my reply.

She had heard of the Oil City disaster, but supposing that I was still in Ohio was at a loss to understand, and her embarrassment, as she scrutinized us, amused me greatly.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Come, mother," I said, turning her gently into the hall, "don't look so bewildered; we are only a few homeless fugitives escaped from the Oil City fire and flood, seeking hospitality."

Nothing could be more loving than her manner when the truth at last had been revealed to her, but in the expression of her countenance there was unmistakable traces of suffering and distress, which were painful to me.

Coming into the light of the room, Nina was about to embrace her.

"Oh, Mrs. Payne," she said. Gently I restrained her, and with a look warning her not to reveal her identity.

Stepping between them and taking my mother in my arms, I asked her the cause of the sadness I read upon her face.

"Oh, John dear," she replied, "I cannot help but reflect."

"You must not reflect," I broke in abruptly; "but mother, if you only knew what a large consignment of happiness I have in store for you, you will agree, I know, that the best thing that ever happened to me was being caught in the flood.

"But here are three tired, starving children who need your immediate care. I leave them to you, and when I have taken a good rest we shall unpack the biggest and happiest surprise you ever saw in all your life."

I knew what she wanted to say, and that it was

## AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

the contemplation of the fact that I might have been untimely taken from her, that threw the shadow of despair across her mind.

"Don't borrow trouble, mother," I said, turning to go to my room, "there's enough lying around loose, without borrowing." Then reflecting, I stepped back to her side. "Why keep the good news longer from her?" I asked myself.

"Come here," I said, with a wave of my hand toward Nina.

"Who is this?" I asked, when she came beside us.

For a brief period my mother scanned her curiously. "Nina Smedley!" she finally exclaimed, extending her arms. "Oh, Nina! is it possible!" Instantly the two women were in each other's embrace.

"Yes, you are right," I answered with energy, "but tell me, are you not glad that I was caught in the flood?"

"I am glad of anything, now," she returned, kissing for the third time Nina's cheek. "But you must go and get into some dry clothes, and leave these people to me."

It was nearing the supper hour when the presence of my mother in the room awakened me from a refreshing sleep. My slumber must have been deep, for I could scarcely believe the day had gone so quickly.

Kneeling beside my bed, and parting the hair from off my forehead she kissed me, for old as I was, and notwithstanding my bigness of frame, to her I was always a boy.

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

"Well, John," she said, continuing to brush back my untidy locks, "it does seem that God's hand has been guiding you; dear little Nina is the same sweet child she was years ago—to think fate would bring you to her in time to save her life!"

"The way of the world, John, is beyond human power to understand, yet it seems that an unseen Hand has had much to do toward shaping your destinies."

"How true," I answered, half to myself, as I looked into her face—it was radiant with the smile of perfect contentment.

"You look happy, mother," I said, studying the lines of her face. "Is it because I have been spared to you, or that Nina is with us?"

She shook her head meaningfully.

"You love her, don't you?" I asked.

"Love her," she returned quickly. "Who could help loving her—yes, John, I love her dearly."

For a time she was silent, and no word passed between us.

"Ah, well," she said at last, rising to go, "I have always believed you were for each other. I know, John, what she is to you, and I love her as dearly as though she belonged to me."

"We shall spoil the supper if we tarry longer," she said, turning to go. "Hurry now, and come down."

Strange that I should dress in one of my best black suits; strange, that like a girl, I should linger before

## AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

the glass to correct every detail of my toilet, strange, that for the first time in my life I was sensitive about my personal appearance.

Ah love! thou dost mould us for good after all, for under thy divine power we strive to bring out that which belongs to the best of our being.

Entering the parlor, my little group greeted me with outstretched hands and smiling faces.

"Come now," said mother, "you have kept us waiting long enough; these little chaps are hungry."

I put the smallest of the children upon my head, and led the way to the dining room.

Few words were spoken by any of us, yet the lightness of our hearts was evidenced in many ways.

Nina—God bless her! in the new gingham gown my mother had procured was a vision of loveliness, and with the little white apron, its tie strings adding a grace to her slender form, I vividly recalled the little playmate in the golden days of yore.

Mrs. Hawley did most of the talking, expatiating strongly upon all of Nina's good points since the night she came to make her home with her.

The evening paper was filled with a full account of the sad affair, including a list of the identified dead, the two Weatherbees, father and son, being among the number.

It was late that evening when I retired, as my day's rest had banished all slumber from my eyes, and a new feeling, too, had crept into my being, imparting a self poise and a freeness of thought which hitherto

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

would have been foreign to the cold matter-of-fact habits of my bachelor mind.

Upon the table, beside which it was my custom to read each night, lay my pipe and books.

Filling that chalice of comfort with the "Indian Weed," I fell into my reading chair, and leaning back found a fancied pleasure in blowing clouds of blue smoke toward the ceiling.

My mind was too unsettled to read, yet mechanically I took up a book, and with no choice of volume brought it before my eyes.

It proved to be a copy of Riley's "Love Lyrics," and as I aimlessly opened it, lo! before my fascinated gaze were the words, "An Old Sweetheart of Mine."

How each word of that beautiful strain appealed to me! How vividly it recalled the days of my youth.

"When I should be her lover forever and a day,  
And she my faithful sweetheart till the golden hair was gray";

\* \* \* \* \*

"And I light my pipe in silence, save a sigh that seems to yoke  
Its fate with my tobacco and to vanish in the smoke."

And then,

"I could see the pink sun-bonnet and the little checkered dress  
She wore when first I kissed her——"

Ah, how that verse brought back the day when, with the pink sun-bonnet hanging carelessly over her little head, Nina had upbraided me for killing the woodchuck.

I closed my eyes, and all the years since those happy days sank into oblivion.

## AN OLD SWEETHEART OF MINE

Once again I heard the droning of lazy walking-beams, mingled with the grasshopper's whir as it rose to meet the rays of an August sun; then the sweet voice of the little girl was wafted back and lulled me into a sleep so sweet that when I waked I pleaded fancy to let me dream it over again.

## CHAPTER XXXV

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

**T**WAS several weeks after the fire and flood before perfect order and discipline were restored to the devastated Oil City. Money poured in from all over the country to aid the homeless, and while there was not a drop of the Standard's products in any way responsible for the dreadful disaster, Standard Oil was one of the most liberal givers to the cause of humanity.

The proverbial bad beginning, which makes a good ending, was the case with my first well in Ohio, for the tools having encountered one of the "caves" common in the limestone country, shot sideways into a fissure and, defying all effort to extricate them, the contractor, after many attempts to "shoot them loose," gave up in despair; and moving the rig in its entirety started all over again, leaving his prize string of tools buried some five hundred feet below the surface of the earth.

Returning one evening from my office I found Nina seated alone behind the vines which shaded our veranda from the afternoon's sun. It was late in July, the weather was fine, and many people were upon the streets.

"Where's the folks?" I asked, taking a chair beside her.

## "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"

"Your mother and Mrs. Hawley have taken the children to town to purchase a few things for them," she replied, shifting her chair a little, "and not being in a walking mood myself I preferred staying here, and have been studying the faces passing on the street.

"What a restless throng humanity is!—Character study was a favorite pastime in which my old friend, Mr. Graham, used to indulge," she continued, after a pause.

Up to this time I had said nothing of the great love I possessed for her, but that I had betrayed it in actions I will not deny, and that she loved me, I was sure; however, I refrained from a confession, feeling it would not be manly to speak of love at a time when her lonely condition would make it seem like an unfair advantage.

"He was a very fine old gentleman," I said, referring to Mr. Graham; "I shall never forget the day we met at the Exchange—did he ever mention it to you?"

"Yes, he told me," she said slowly, bowing her head meditatively.

"I was very much disappointed in not seeing you that day," I continued, "but I had learned to regard disappointment as in keeping with the trend of my regular existence."

"Have you had many disappointments?" she asked. "Your mother has been telling me of your marvellous success in the oil business; surely you have met

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

with few disappointments in your business enterprises."

"That would depend on what one considers a business enterprise to be," I replied; "but, Miss Smedley, don't you know that the success of many men is but the result of bold plunging, undertaken to divert their minds from the bitterness of a real disappointment?"

"I hardly understand that," she returned with the least suspicion of a smile; "tell me what you mean by a real disappointment."

"No words are capable of defining it," I replied awkwardly, "it is one of those conditions we feel, but cannot describe."

"Has your success in the business world been the result of 'bold plunging?'" she asked.

"Well—yes—and—no," I replied cautiously; "some of my friends have deemed me a sort of reckless plunger, but I do not think so. Mother, you know, has exerted a great influence over me—I have refrained from many things on her account."

"She has told me much of your goodness to her, and believe me, to this is due all of your success; the man who would neglect his mother, would fail, no matter what his opportunities might be. I believe this an unerring law of God."

"If you only knew, Miss Smedley," I explained, "how patiently and willingly my dear little mother slaved for me after the death of my father, my devotion to her would then seem an inadequate recompense—think of the years of my early life, a helpless

## "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"

youth, and she, uncomplainingly living in poverty and obscurity, sacrificing the best days of her life, exiled among oil wells in the woods, and all the while planning for the future man within me.

"I remember how for one long, cold winter she kept the gaunt wolf from the door by incessant toiling over a wash-tub; and yet, no matter how tired or worn, when night time came, and the evening meal was laid she would tell me little instructive stories; then, after hearing my prayers, tuck me away between two snowy sheets where nothing disturbed me till morning.

"How many times have I stood at the window, the thermometer registering eight and ten degrees below zero, watching her sweeping a path beneath an illy constructed clothes-line, before venturing out with that day's washing; and many times have I wakened in the night and peering out saw her busily at work ironing the clothes that I was to deliver the next day to the men working around the wells.

"Ah, Miss Smedley, those are the kind of trials that strengthen our affections, teach us patience, and like bands of iron, make the ties of love so strong that no power but death can break them."

"The stream that flows smoothly is never clear," she said thoughtfully, "the life which flows uninterrupted, is bound to become sluggish. The babbling brook is made pure and sweet by the many rocks it has to encounter on its journey to the sea; so, too, our lives are made better and purer by being

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

jostled against the adversities which seem inevitable to many of us."

"That is a beautiful sentiment, Miss Smedley," I replied, "and while I fully indorse every word of it, you will agree that it is pretty hard to take an optimistic view of our adversities, rather our disappointments."

"And that is why such trials sweeten and purify our characters; the optimist is too apt to become indifferent."

As thus we talked, and looking at her from time to time the thought would come to me, "Is it possible that I am talking face to face with the woman so dear to me all these years? Why not confess all to her and free the love, pent since early boyhood, in my heart!"

"If the optimist is apt to become indifferent, as you think, Miss Smedley, the pessimist must be one who sees things as they really are, and expects nothing from the future but disappointment; in other words, the fellow who never hopes," I said.

"To be without hope," she quickly returned, "would make pessimists of us all."

"Surely then, I am not a pessimist, for no man could be more hopeful than I."

"In what way?" she asked; then as if the import of my remark had occurred to her, she quickly added, "I presume you are rather hopeful of the new well you are drilling out in Ohio?"

"To drill a well without hope," I agreed, feeling

“ALL’S WELL THAT ENDS WELL”

I had ventured a little too close to the brink of my fondest desire, “would be the worst kind of pessimism; hope springs eternal in the producer’s breast.”

“Pope said, ‘human breast,’ ” she said, raising a finger at me and smiling.

“Same thing,” I replied, “every producer that I know is human; not one of them but what suffers hopes, joys, fears, and are even capable of falling in love—yes, indeed, they are all quite human.”

“Your mother told me you were in Oil City yesterday,” she said, as if to turn the subject.

“Yes, I had a very important business transaction there—another one of those projects based upon a hope—may I tell you about it?”

“Certainly,” she answered, “I like to hear about those big moneyed transactions you oil men have; did it culminate as you wished?”

“As yet, I am unable to say, but I hope so.”

“Hope is a good breakfast, but a poor supper; in your case, I sincerely trust that you will never have to go to bed hungry.”

“Thank you,” I said, wondering if she was aware how my mind was construing her words.

“This business transaction,” I continued, “will probably make me a glorious future; strange, too, I came across it by chance. It happened like this: One evening while talking to an old fellow, who, by the way, used to know my father, he dropped a few words concerning property he was working on; and afterwards, seeing that it would make a good investment

## OIL WELLS IN THE WOODS

if properly handled, I opened negotiations, never relinquishing till I had secured a title clear, to mansions in the——”

“Skies,” she ventured.

“No, Pennsylvania is good enough for me; mansions in the sky would be too angelic for us oil men; but let me tell you about this property.

“After securing possession, naturally, I looked the place over in detail, and found there was much more to it than I had expected; so much more in fact, that to manage it alone would be entirely out of the question.”

“Could you not employ a good man to take charge of it for you?”

I shook my head negatively, and laughed outright.

“No, dear,” I said, “no man could be trusted.”

“Why do you laugh?” she asked. “What is there about this property which makes you so mysterious?”

“Nina—let me call you that,” I said, drawing my chair closer to her, “if I am mysterious, it is not the possession of this property that makes me so, but the longing for a partner to whom I can give its management; and no one, darling, but you, can be given the place.”

“Me!” she exclaimed, “why me?”

“Because, Nina, I love you, have loved you since those days of happy childhood, when free and ignorant of the world, we spent the purest time of our lives together.

“I little thought it was you the night chance

## "ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL"

brought us together, but when I learned that it was, I was able to understand why I loved you.

"The home you were in that time is now mine, and is the property which makes me so mysterious; I want to bring you back to it; it stands to-day as you left it, unchanged beyond the natural defacement of time."

She was now in tears.

Leaving my seat and bending over the chair, I kissed her.

"May I, sweetheart, may I bring you back to your old home?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Returning from our wedding trip through the West, we reached Lima in time for Mrs. Payne to drop the "go devil," which set free the famous "Jones gusher," that dwarfed the record of the "646" into oblivion.

THE END









